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GAME & WATCH



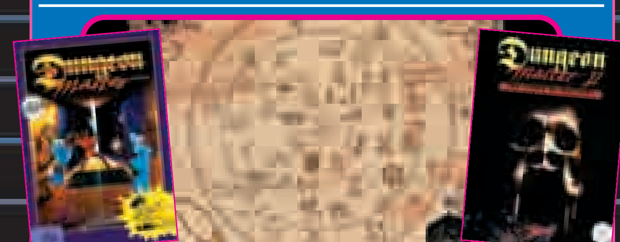
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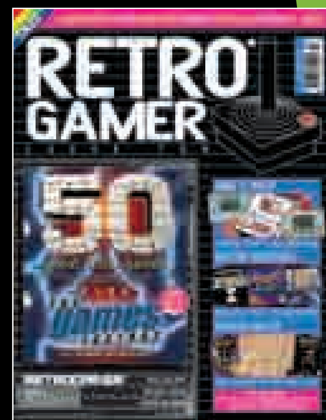
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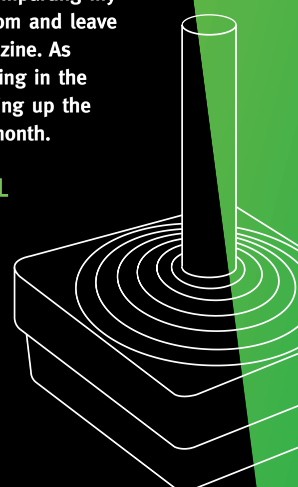
hello

I was recently in Asda, nosing around the entertainment section (where most blokes tend to hide while their wives hit the aisles) when I spotted a copy of Fifa 2005. Nothing unusual there, except that it was for the PSone. That's right – Electronic Arts, the world's leading videogame publisher, is still releasing games for Sony's ten-year-old console. When I returned home, I checked Amazon and found a couple of other new PSone games – Duel Masters: Sempai Legends from Atari, and Yeti Sports Deluxe from JoWooD Communications.

It got me thinking. Not about whether the PSone should be classed as a retro console or not, but about the earning potential of these releases. Both Duel Masters and Yeti Sports Deluxe are retailing for around £10, and yet they may be worth a lot more in the future. These games certainly won't be produced in great numbers – a few thousand copies at the most – so they must be seen as potential investments for a retro collector. Don't get me wrong, when Fifa 2025 debuts on the PlayStation 7, Fifa 2005 on the PSone will probably be worth around one Euro, but I can assure you that some of the games released late in the console's life will be worth a small fortune in the future.

Right, I'll stop imparting my questionable wisdom and leave you with the magazine. As always, keep sending in the feedback and stoking up the forum. Until next month.

MARTYN CARROLL
EDITOR



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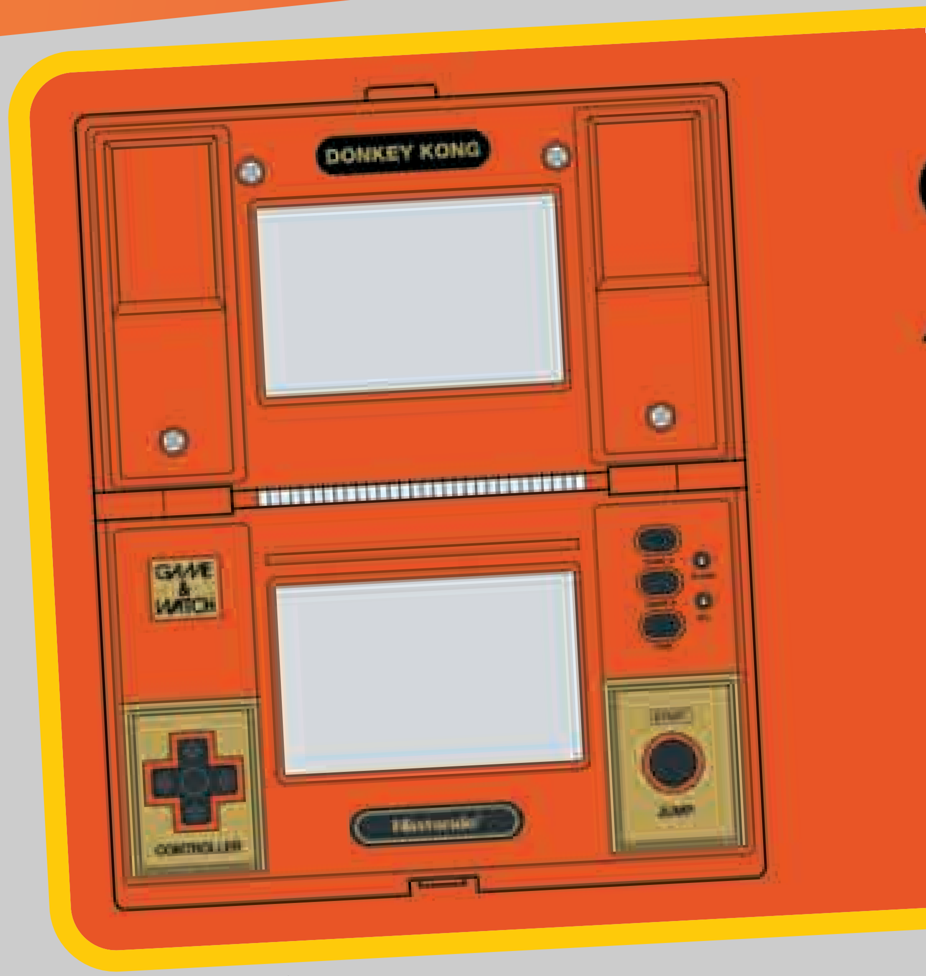

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RETRO NEWS

NEWS-OLA

Empire Strikes Back

Taito deal sees arcade classics resurrected

Empire is to publish a collection of Tatio's coin-op hits on PS2, Xbox and PC. Over 30 classic games are to be included in the pack, with titles like Space Invaders, Bubble Bobble, Rainbow Islands and Operation Wolf topping the bill.



It's hardly surprisingly to see the dust blown off Taito's back catalogue, especially as both Midway and Activision have done very well out of their recent retro anthologies. And as we reported back in issue eight, both Atari and Tecmo are to release similar collections in the next few months.

At present, not a lot else is know about the Taito compilation. Besides the games already confirmed, we're hoping that Arkanoid, Chase HQ, Double Dragon, New Zealand Story, Rastan Saga and Super Space Invaders will all be included. We'll also grin inanely if Operation Wolf comes with light-gun support.

No firm release date has been confirmed yet, but we expect it to be around Easter time next year. Of course we'll let you know more in the coming months.

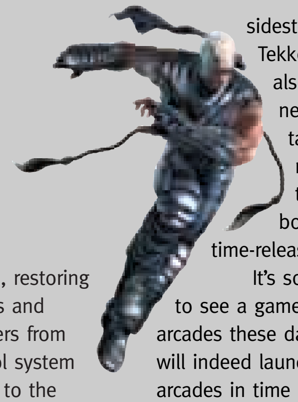




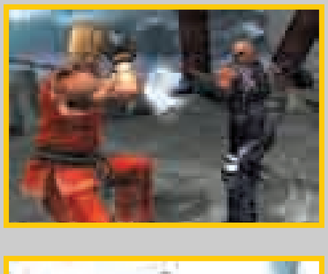
Re-enter the Tekken

Behold the fifth Iron Fist Tournament

Namco has revealed more details concerning Tekken 5. And it's looking like good news for those who'd given up on the series. Where as Tekken 4 went for a more realistic approach, trying (and failing) to match Virtua Fighter 4 blow for blow, Tekken 5 will "return to the roots of Tekken", restoring the over the top moves and larger than life characters from the original. The control system has also reverted back to the classic setup. Pushing up and down will make your player jump and crouch, rather then sidestepping as in Tekken 4. The sequel also features three new characters, taking the total number of fighters to 23 (and there's bound to be extra time-released characters).



It's something of a rarity to see a game debut in the arcades these days, but Tekken 5 will indeed launch in Japanese arcades in time for Christmas. Hopefully the UK release won't be far behind. See you down the local Namco Station then...





Important happenings in the wonderful retro world

This month // Classic Taito collection // Tekken returns // Shining Force sequel // Mobile Zool // GTA III on NES // Retro Auction Watch // Retro Round-up...

Sega Shines On

Tears of joy as Shining Force returns

Sega of America has announced that the Shining Force series is set to make a comeback on the PlayStation 2. The new game, entitled Shining Tears, is being billed as the "spiritual successor" to Shining in the Darkness and the Shining Force trilogy.

The new game is set to advance the series, with the strategy RPG gameplay of Shining Force being replaced with real-time battles. But if you're thinking that this sounds like a typical next-gen update, Sega has revealed that the game will feature 2D anime-style environments. Up to 50 enemies can appear on screen at any one time, and you can enlist the help of a partner to assist in the battle against these overwhelming odds. Throw in all the



usual character customisation options, and a ridiculously long completion time, and you have all the makings of a fantastic adventure. The game is being developed by Nextech and it's pencilled in for a March 2005 release date over in the US.

In other Sega news, the company has announced that the US release of Altered Beast has been cancelled. At present, the game is still due out in



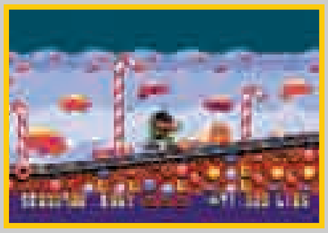
Europe in the New Year, but we wouldn't be surprised if the title is canned completely outside of Japan. Talk about giving with one hand and taking away with the other...

Mobile Zool

The Ninja of the 'Nth' Dimension knuckles up



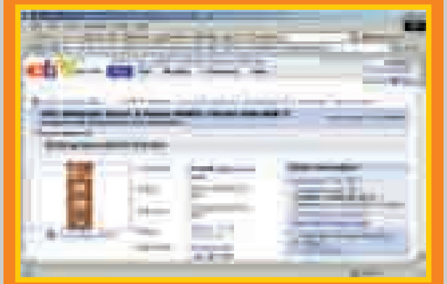
Zool is to be revived after a 10-year absence, appearing on mobile technology courtesy of Zoo Digital. Gremlin Graphics' 16-bit mascot first appeared on the Amiga back in 1992, and was later ported to several consoles including the Master System, Megadrive, SNES and GameBoy, with a sequel appearing in 1993. It's not yet known whether the game will be a brand new adventure or a remake of the original game. What we do know is that it's due out spring next year and will be available for all major handheld devices. Until we have further details, keep an eye on the developer's homepage at **www.mobilescope.com**.



Retro Auction Watch

Richard Burton takes us on another tour of duty around the online auction sites

First up this month is another one of those rare Game & Watches from Nintendo. Super Mario Bros (YM-901-S) was the 60th Game & Watch to be released and was only available to the gaming public through an F-1 Grand Prix Tournament in Japan. It came complete with a presentation case, a white outer box and a letter from Nintendo. Although 10,000 units of the game were produced, it's still an incredibly hard game to find, particularly in good condition. The one spotted on eBay recently fetched the obscenely expensive sum of £730, or at least it would have done had it met the reserve price.



Anyone who has ever held a joystick in their hand must have owned or at least played on an Atari VCS system at some point in their gaming lives. Is yours stashed away in your attic? Is it the 'Woody' version? You might just want to dig it out and check a few things...

The Atari CX2600, to give it its right and proper name, has been around for 27 years. Did you know that there are several versions of the original model in circulation though? There are at least four versions of the

original wood-encrusted console and one of these is worth a damn sight more than your other bog standard issues.

The first ever release of the Atari 2600 was in 1977 and that particular production run lasted one year. The result was a console nicknamed by collectors and Atari fanatics as the 'Heavy Sixer'. It was given this name because it was a lot weightier than future releases of the console, due to the substantial internal RF shielding it contained. It also had six switches for games settings rather than the four it was later trimmed down to.

So how do you spot a Heavy Sixer? Apart from the obvious weight differential, the serial number sticker on the back should indicate where the machine was made. If it's Hong Kong, where most were produced, you're out of luck. If it says Sunnydale, California then you've found yourself one of the first incarnations of the gaming legend. If you're doubly lucky and still have the original box you should also find a matching serial number sticker on the packaging. One such eBayer had just that very item and sold his for a pocket swelling £460.

When you think that a standard Hong Kong 2600 goes for around £25, it might just be worth turning your old wood grained beast over and checking its plasticised underbelly before consigning it to the car-boot sale.

It's not very often (ie never) that a Commodore Amiga game attains more than a few pounds for its owner. So, it came as a bit of a surprise when a game entitled The Kristol pulled in a jaw-dropping £367.50. The game was actually The Kristal by Addictive (of Football Manager fame) and quite why this went for well over £300 nobody seems sure. However, you can be absolutely positive of one thing – a few more copies will start springing up on eBay over the coming weeks.

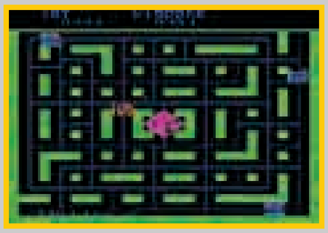


And to finish off, a quick look back to Retro Gamer issue 1. It seems the inaugural copy of the magazine has still got the pulling power of a steam powered tug-of-war team. After a feeding frenzy on eBay shortly after the initial launch, the price of the first issue sky-rocketed, but common sense soon took hold and the price tailed off somewhat to a more sensible range. It appears, however, the price is starting to move northwards once again. A copy recently sold with a final winning bid of £53. Oh how I wish I bought those 10 copies in WHSmiths...

Perfect Tronic

Classic Tron action comes to the GBA







Tron 2.0: Killer App is to appear on the GameBoy Advance in time for Christmas. Hardly the most exciting news we know, but the handheld version does have a couple of surprises up its sleeve. By playing through the new game you can unlock the arcade versions of Tron and its sequel, Discs of Tron.

The original game was released by Bally Midway in 1982 and featured four games, each based on a scene from the film, although the Light Cycles section is the element most people remember. Discs of Tron was to be part of the original game, but due to time constraints, it was dropped and released in 1983 as a standalone title. By the look of these screenshots, it's likely to be a faithful version. We'll let you know how they play when we get our hands on the game.

RETRO ROUND-UP

The latest scene news for your enjoyment

Win win win!



As the festive season nears, Cronosoft has been getting in the spirit of things and has very kindly donated its current catalogue of Spectrum games to give away in this exclusive competition. The games that could be yours are EggHead in Space, Dead or Alive, Hop and Chop, Gloop, Football Glory, Rough Justice, ZblastSD+ and Fun Park. All that you have to do is tell us which of these was Cronosoft's first release. A clue is found on its website at **www.cronosoft.co.uk**. Answers on a postcard to Retro Gamer Cronosoft Competition, Live Publishing International Ltd, Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK10 4NP.

Or you can email your answer to **competiton@retrogamer.net** if you live in the future. The closing date is 31st January 2005.

Gangster Tripping

Grand Theft Auto III on the NES?

Forget about GTA: San Andreas selling 3 billion copies during its first hour on sale. We're more interested in the news of Grand Theftendo, a version of GTA III for the NES. This fan-project is being developed by Brian Provinciano, and apparently it has been in development since late 2002.

Call us sceptical, but when we first heard about this we dismissed it as a publicity stunt by Rockstar to promote San Andreas. But having taken a good long look at Brian's site, we're confident that Grand Theftendo is legit. And damn us if we're not quite exciting about it! Naturally the game is in 2D – it's looking a lot like the GameBoy Color version of the original GTA, but it will feature an accurate rendition of the Portland map plus many of the missions!

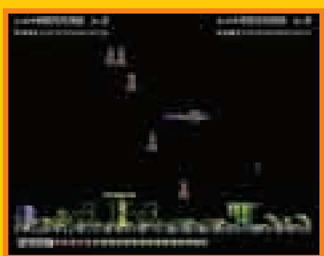
There's no release date as yet, but Brian promises that the game will be available as a free download when finished. In the meantime you can see how it's coming along by visiting **www.grandtheftendo.com**.







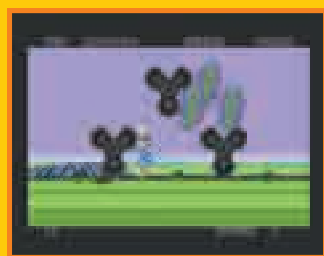




Drop the bomb

Chris West is the man accredited with several C64 hits, including memorable shoot-em-ups R.I.S.K and Super Space Invaders. R.I.S.K was released by The Edge in 1987, but it had to be renamed because of a pending law suite from Parker Brothers, and so became known as K.R.I.S. Chris began work on a sequel to this game, but unfortunately it was never released commercially or completely finished.

Recently however, the guys at Lemon 64 (**www.lemon64.com**) tracked down Chris for an interview, and in doing so he remembered the planned sequel, found the development disks and has now archived a playable demo on his homepage at **http://west-racing.net/bomb/**. The game is called Bomb and is a horizontally-scrolling shoot-em-up bearing similarities to Scramble. It's is a bit of a tough cookie, but perfectly enjoyable. We hope to see it finished very soon, but until then give it a blast with your favourite emulator.



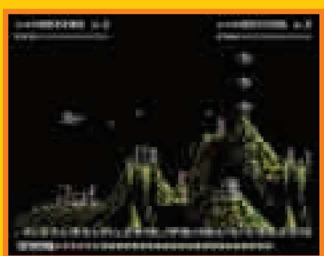


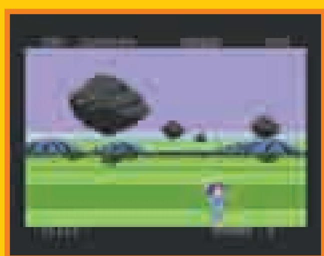
Harrier attack

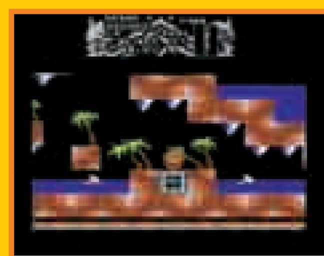
The popular arcade game Space Harrier is currently being painstakingly ported to the Atari XL/XE machines. This development is really shaping up nicely thanks to the hard work and dedication of programmer Chris Hutt, who has recently released a video file of the game in action. Chris has used interlacing techniques to simulate the appearance of more colours on the screen, and the scrolling routine used is very fast. It really looks and sounds fantastic, so head over to **www.sheddyshack.co.uk/index.htm** where you'll find some nice screenshots, a diary and a playable demo. You can also send him your messages of encouragement to **cghutt@hotmail.com**.

Slim Jim

Originally created by Argus Designs a little over a decade ago, Jim Slim was a weird puzzle-come-platform game that was unfortunately never commercially released, and the game was left in a nearly finished but abandoned state. However, this technically impressive puzzler has recently been brought back from the dead thanks to the guys at Protovision. Price and release date are still to be announced, but we're expecting to see it sometime next year as the guys work on debugging and improving the game. Keep an eye on **www.protovision-online.de** for further information about this project.







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Konix love

Hi there gang. I really enjoyed your feature on the Konix Multi System. I remember seeing various preview features for the console in games magazines at the time. I also remember not being very impressed as I was an Amiga owner at the time and the screenshots of Hammerfist and Mutant Camels didn't look any better than the Amiga games of the same period. Being a technical type I realised from reading the hardware specifications that the console had good potential (256 colours on screen!) and I have always wondered why the system failed to materialise.

Even back then, I thought that the console was a bit gimmicky with its transforming steering wheel/jet ski/flight yoke controller, and this certainly did not make me want to buy it. No doubt, the same system with an arcade version of Afterburner or OutRun running on it would have convinced me.

I was surprised that your article didn't address the console's biggest flaw – the built-in controller itself. As someone who has gone through loads of joysticks in my time (quality ones at that) I can't help wondering what you would do when the controller broke. Also, the design of the console necessitates you to have it on your lap or on a small table in front of the TV. The decision to use disks instead of cartridges also seems dodgy given the amount of vibration and shaking that it may well have been subjected to. Surely this would have caused at the very least read errors, and as a result system crashes.

Overall this was an excellent and informative article. I was especially impressed by the amount of detail that was packed into it. The only slight niggle was the tiny screenshots used to show the games running on the system. Bigger screenshots throughout your magazine would in fact improve Retro Gamer in general.

I found the Bubble Bobble article excellent and very colourfully presented. While I'm here, I'd like to request a similar feature on Shadow of the Beast for the Amiga. It has been rightly lambasted for its shallow gameplay, but graphically and sonically it really did seem amazing at the time. I found that it had a strange appeal beyond the sum of its parts and gave it far more playtime than it should have deserved. I'd love to know how the game worked technically, and how all of those levels of parallaxed scrolling were achieved on the humble A500.

How about having an article in a similar vein to the Konix one but on the Atari Panther instead? I remember reading a feature in a magazine with an interview with the Yakster himself Jeff Minter, and screenshots of various technical demos were included. As I recall, these demonstrated the Panther's sprite-scaling capabilities, showing what looked like grey meteors gradually increasing in size as they moved towards the viewer from the back of the screen.

I'd also like to see articles on some of the more obscure or exotic consoles like the FM Towns PCs, Apple's Pippin and NEC's Super Grafx and PC FX since I don't know that much about them, and I'm sure that other readers would be interested besides myself.

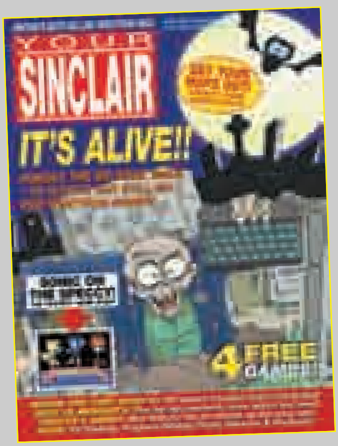
Richard Patrick, Woking

RG: Thanks for the suggestions Richard. Many of them have been taken on board, and we're looking

to increase the quality of the screenshots where possible, but this can be difficult when we are trying to source images of rare systems and games, as I'm sure you understand.

Funky skillo

I thought it was time to write – having read Retro Gamer since issue one – and congratulate you on producing a good-quality read every month. I used to own a ZX Spectrum in the 80s but after starting full-time employment in 1987, I binned all my Crash and YS Magazines. My Spectrum and vast collection of games followed the same route a year later. Why did I do this? Don't ask!



Anyway, I just picked up issue nine today with the free Your Sinclair supplement and what can I say, but thanks a lot! Due to this supplement, you have now made me want to buy a 'new' Spectrum along with all the old magazines and games. I know I could use an emulator, but it just doesn't feel the same as using the original Spectrum. I'm particularly looking forward to revisiting some old text and graphic adventure games as they were my favoured genre all those years ago. I've pointed my bank manager in your direction when my next credit card bill arrives. I hope you guys don't mind.

Nick C, Devon, via email

RG: We too are happy with the Your Sinclair supplement, and overall feedback has been very positive. The fact that it has encouraged you to get hold of a Spectrum proves that the supplement has done its job. Besides including a few retrospective YS pieces, we really wanted to draw attention to the present-day Spectrum scene, as quality software is still being released for the 20-year-old machine.

The great Atlantic divide

Allow me to add my opinion on the 'ban hunting' debate. Readers could keep sending in locations and you could pass them on to a third party who would ensure that any machines found remained available to the public. It breaks my heart to see inert machines tucked away in so many corners, so this could be the best of all worlds. The machines are recovered and restored, the public can still play them, and the arcade owner, who hadn't either the time or money to restore his dead machines, would pocket a few quid for a waste of space. Just a thought…

Back to FFVII, thanks to our friends across the water (my ex-pat American wife was interested to see so many letters from Yanks in issue eight). Derek Rooney makes a great point about games being epochal and how they can lodge in our minds like good music. But I maintain my stance on FFVII. Great game, sure, but I'm willing to bet it won't be top of the readers' Top 100. OK, I'm not going to put my copy of Panzer Dragoon Saga up for grabs, but I still think it's not going to happen. We'll see, I guess.

As for the magazine, I was hoping to not have to bother with the sycophantic praise this time, but issue eight seemed written just for me. My beloved Dreamcast (the little fella no longer needs to rest in peace), Treasure, the Top 100, Turrican – all beautiful stuff. I've loved the magazine from day one, but it seems like you guys are ramping things up constantly now. Bring it on.

Chris, via email

RG: Well, by now you'll know what our readers voted as their greatest game ever – the endearing British classic Elite, so your copy of Panzer Dragoon Saga was never under threat. FFVII did make the top 10 though, which is hardly surprising as it's probably the first proper RPG to break through into the mainstream over here. Glad you liked issue eight. We've said it before a hundred times, but we genuinely, honestly try and improve the magazine with each issue.

Future retro

So far, I have every single issue of Retro Gamer, and now, as a subscriber, I am the proud owner of a lovely T-shirt, binder and pin badge. Not only is Retro Gamer a well-written, informative, interesting and wonderfully nostalgic magazine, it does also look to the future somewhat as well. Games that come out today may, a few years down the line, be considered

* Star letter *

Our well-dressed friends at Joystick Junkies (**www.joystickjunkies.com**) produce official clothing based on loads of classic videogames, and the winner can select any T-shirt from the range

Sticky situation

Thank you for the great Konix Multi System article. As I went to school at Bishop Hedley High near the Konix factory, I thought I would share this little tale with you. In the late 80s there was a craze at our school for little black and red striped stickers (about the size of a two-pound coin). These stickers were everywhere – stuck to ceilings, walls, floors; thousands of them everywhere. In fact, the problem got so bad that if caught in possession of these stickers you would be rewarded with instant detention. Where did these stickers come from? At the time Konix was producing its popular Speedking joystick, which had a large red and black striped sticker on the top, except that where the stick protruded there was a hole punched out about the size of a two-pound coin. These punched out circles were then thrown in a skip (but not for long). How many detentions Konix was responsible for we will never know.

Which leads me to a suggestion. What about a feature on classic joysticks? The Cheetah 125, Zipstick, Competition Pro and RAM Delta. All superb controllers, all lasting only months in the right hands (mine).

Kevin Davies, via email

Great story there Kevin! It just wouldn't be right if you walked away empty handed, so help yourself to a free T-shirt.





retro enough to be featured extensively, perhaps even so much as to be given away on the coverdisc.

As a 24 year-old, I have seen the best years of gaming in the 80s and 90s, missing out only on the very early games. I have also started to collect a few retro bits and bats, and am always on the lookout for a bargain (it has to be a bargain, I don't have the time or money to do this seriously, but then if I did it seriously, it wouldn't be fun anymore!).

I grew up with two Pong consoles (The Ingersoll and one that I can't remember the name of. I believe the Ingersoll was the first one with a light gun), a TI-99/4A (we have two here, fully working, with a cupboard full of tapes of typed-up listings from such magazines as 99'er and Personal Computing Weekly) and a Spectrum, after which I advanced onto the Amiga, and finally the PC. Of course, I've spent many hours re-living the memories of yesteryear, but to me emulation pales in comparison to playing the games on the real thing.

To this end, I started making my own little games room which currently holds the Spectrum, Amiga, one of the TI-99/4As, a SNES, Saturn, Dreamcast, PlayStation and N64. When I find time, which isn't often, I can sit down and play some of these games the way they were meant to be played, and even if they do look dated, they're still fun.

I have a few suggestions for features that I thought you might like to consider. First, I would love to see an extensive feature on the old electronic handheld games such as BMX Flyer, Invader 1000, the Tomytronic 3D 'binocular' games and the Game & Watch series. I also have a Playskool Maximus, which is a little learning toy, like an early version of some of the V-Tech stuff that you see advertised these days. I think there's lots of mileage in this line.

Secondly, PD Demos. Do you guys remember them? I still load Shock or NMI3 up on the Speccy, and am still impressed. I know they aren't games, but PD libraries often had a lot of games too. I remember ordering Parachute Joust on the Amiga (along with some free music software) and I was hooked on that for hours!

Somebody asked about a TI article. This series of computers had all manner of add-ons and peripherals, so again, there's mileage in this article. If it's any help at all in the writing of this article, we still have our working TI-99/4As here, along with several games modules and as I said, lots of tapes with typed-in listings.

Finally, can I say well done on the bonus issue of Your Sinclair. My Spectrum days saw me purchase YS every month until it finished, and I remember being quite upset at the demise of my favourite Spectrum magazine, despite my mother's hatred of me picking up their lingo… Brillo!

FishstaBoy, via email

RG: Taking your points in order. We've got a Game & Watch feature this very issue, so already we've hopefully satisfied your hunger there a little. As for the other electronic games, well it's something that we are looking into. Shaun is a fan of Public Domain demos, so that's a possibility. Finally, the Texas TI994/A is definitely a machine that we're planning to cover, as it was the world's first 16-bit home computer years before the Amiga and Atari ST. It's also a fine machine, so expect a feature early next year.

MSX donation

I'm lucky enough to have been reading since issue one (except issues four and five), and have to add to the 'keep it up' campaign. Every issue contains enough to get the memories flowing, especially the Konix article last issue. Being that age around the time I kept in touch with news about this 'super console' by following articles in The Games Machine. I was heartbroken when it never appeared.

Anyway, onto the point. I've been having a late spring clean and dug out my old Toshiba HX-10 MSX computer, still boxed(ish), and in working order with leads, tape recorder and a few tape games. I was just about to list it on eBay, but wondered instead if there may be some kind of computer museum that would appreciate it as a donation. Is there such an institution? And if not why not, or why not start



one? I'm sure plenty readers have similar items taking up space they wouldn't mind donating?

Shane Reed, via email

PS. Will it soon be the turn of the MSX (a vastly underrated 8-bit machine) to appear in the magazine? I'd be particularly interested in a piece about the Konami cartridges which were always too expensive (at around £15) for my pocket. How do the kids afford £40 games these days? Also what about an article on the Magic Knight series of games?

RG: Well Shane, if there are any preservation societies that want to get in touch with us, we'll pass on their details to you. This is a great idea in our opinion. We are beginning to sound like a stuck record, but, yes, the MSX is on our forward features list. As for the Magic Knight games, you'll be happy to hear that Martyn is a fan of the series, so it's just a matter of time… Wonder what Magic Knight author David Jones is up to these days?

Name the game

Sorry to bother but can somebody please help me? There was an arcade game out between 1985 and 1989 I think. It was something to do with a hero whose weapon was a chain (it might have been a chain and ball, I'm not sure). Your weapon was able to strike forward, up and in a circle. I can also remember there were these red blobs that appeared from the ground and spat fire at you. On

Facing the chop

I was speaking to the manager of the Claremont Pier in Lowestoft (featured in last month's Arcade Hunt update). He was nicely surprised he had a little mention in the magazine, but the Turbo OutRun that was pictured has since been chopped up. He did advise me it had a minor fault, but if known at the time would have let it go for free to a good home. He actually apologised for chopping it up as didn't realise there would have been an interest in this gem of a game. It just goes to show that not all arcade owners are in it to make an extra buck.

Michael Gordon, Lowestoft

RG: Turbo OutRun chopped up? Noooo! What a waste. It doesn't matter that it can't be emulated by MAME. It was the shiny white sit-down model. We're choking up…





another level there was a waterfall with flying creatures coming at you and you had to jump from ledge to ledge. I can't remember anything else as it was a long time ago. I am almost positive it came out just after Ghosts 'n' Goblins. Please help as it's starting to drive me mad!
Stewart Allan, via email

RG: That sounds very much like Rygar to us, released by Tecmo in 1986 (a year after Ghosts 'n' Goblins). Anyone else got any games they need identifying? We love a good challenge…

I'm a lady!

Hi Retro Gamer. It may surprise you to note that I am a woman. I know you were surprised to find out how many adolescent retro gamers that are out there. To the same end, I'm in a minority as a female reader of your magazine. Presumably, therefore I could have seen the Game Over poster as lewd and offensive, but I saw it for the piece of heritage it was, considering that gaming has always been considered as a male pursuit.

Now to why I'm writing. I would love to see a feature on the Dragon 32 as this was our first home computer. I especially love the game Ugh! and I still have a copy of it as well as a Dragon itself. And the Amiga feature was a good opener. Hopefully, you'll be moving onto Amiga games at some point in the future. I used to love beating my sister at Dynoblaster. Do any of you guys remember that game? Finally, it was good to see Ellie Gibson representing women in gaming with her review of Metal Slug for the PlayStation 2. I'm considering making the purchase thanks to her review.
Michelle Sawyer, via email

RG: As we have said in the past, we do intend to look at the Dragon computer at some point in the future, and we've been chatting with a couple of people involved in Dragon software preservation. Oh, and we're sure Ellie will be chuffed to bits with your comments.

Mac attack

I was a C64 gamer back in the day but I'm loving your articles about all the systems. And please keep the old adverts section – it's a blast!

I know it's been mentioned before, but I wanted to add some input on the coverdiscs. I'm a Mac user and therefore the coverdisc content is largely wasted on me. Now, in the case of game remakes and other PC/Windows software, I'm not bothered. I play all my old Commodore games on an emulator so I get everything I need from the Web. Where I think things can be improved is with the content that doesn't have to be platform specific.

I really wanted to see the Spectrum game endings, and since I'm not a complete dork I was able to access the zipped .avi files and play them in Quicktime. But, content like this needn't be restricted to that Windoze-only front end that you supply. I'm no expert but wouldn't one solution be to package the content in HTML? Then all Windoze, Mac and Linux users could happily browse away. We Mac users could still see all the article-related content and not worry about the software that you include for Windoze users. Just a thought.

Anyway, despite that one minor grumble I'm a very happy reader. All the best for the future with the mag.
Martin Gleeson, Dublin, via email

RG: Feedback to our dual-format Steel Sky coverdisc was very favourable, so we're looking at various ways to include platform-unspecific content. Hopefully it won't be much longer now.

God's gift

Apologies for the obvious intro but what a great mag. I'm hooked! Waiting for your next issue reminds me of how excited I used to get as the date drew closer for the next issue of Crash to come out all those years ago. Subscriptions are all sorted online these days so no more sprints to the local newsagent. How times have changed!

I used to buy many games but I would also be found copying the odd game or two. I remember the good old C90s being crammed with games on both sides. My dad had a JVC double tape deck with a 'high-speed dubbing' mode which was great for copying at twice the normal speed. I often invited mates back to my house at lunch time (I lived very close to the school) and they would bring their new games to play on my machine. This activity had two main benefits for yours truly: 1) Save my £1 pound lunch money by scoffing junk food at home (great way to save up for my next new game), and 2) Whilst my mates were playing whatever new game they had brought along I would be secretly making a quick copy of it on my old man's double deck. Lovely jubbly.

I'm now the proud owner of two original arcade games which I have in my garage. These are Track & Field and Defender (see photo). I hope to grow this collection but they're not cheap. I would like to see more features in RG detailing private collections of similar classic machines.

Finally, I was a huge Spectrum fan and used to spend hours trying to complete all those near-impossible games. One that I remember playing for weeks was Gift From the Gods by Ocean. Not one of Ocean's best games by a long stretch but I found it strangely addictive. My big question to all Speccy gamers from the past is, did anyone manage to complete this game? I didn't get close and I've never seen the ending registered on the websites such as speccyspoilers.co.uk.
Darren Courtnell, via email

RG: Nice machines there Darren. Wasn't Gift From the Gods born from the ashes of one of Imagine's so-called 'Megagames'? We're sure someone out there must have completed it. If not, then you can always cheat – a Multiface can be found at www.the-tipshop.co.uk.



RETRO REVIEWS

From old games on new platforms to new games on old platforms. As long as it's retro, you'll find it in our regular reviews section

In a change to our normal proceedings, from this issue onwards our Hall of Fame and Shame will be decided by you! Send in your reviews of around 650 words to reviews@retrogamer.net, and we'll consider them for inclusion in a future issue...

Street Fighter Anniversary Collection



Developer:	Capcom
Price:	£29.99
Format:	Xbox

Apparently Street Fighter is 15 years old, hence the release of this anniversary pack. But with the arcade original released back in 1987, and the superlative sequel appearing in 1991, we can't quite get the dates to work out. Still, anniversary or not, there's plenty to celebrate here.

The collection's main draw is Hyper Street Fighter II. This updated version of the classic brawler takes five Street Fighter II strands and ties them into a precise knot, resulting in the ultimate incarnation of the game. You get SFII: The World Warrior, SFII: Champion Edition, SFII Turbo, SFII: The New Challengers and Super SFII Turbo. Purists may not be pleased that the games have been clumped together, especially as the older Street Fighter Collection packs for the PlayStation and Saturn featured several of the games as standalone titles, but it does make for some interesting battles as you mix and match characters. You can, for example, pit Ryu from The World Warrior against Ryu from Super SFII Turbo, to see how the older version shapes up against his quick-footed counterpart. To top things off nicely, the game is Xbox Live compatible, allowing you to challenge others in the online arena.

In addition to Hyper SFII you get the excellent SFII animated movie, and even better, Street Fighter III: Third Strike, which wasn't present in the PS2 version of the collection (in the UK at least). The game did appear briefly on the Dreamcast, and now it's quite sought after, so this may be the only chance you get to own the game.

Street Fighter Anniversary Collection is a must for both fans of the series and beat-em-up enthusiasts alike. For our money, the only thing missing is the original Street Fighter game. As such, it stops just short of being the complete Street Fighter collection.

Martyn Carroll

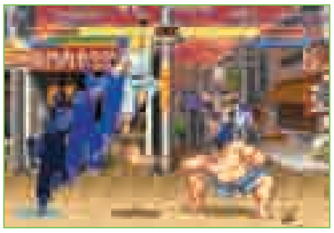
Graphics 90%
2D fighting at its finest. The Xbox's massive memory ensures that every frame of animation is present.

Sound 75%
The games are arcade perfect, so we get all the original tunes and effects.

Playability 92%
SFII provides instant thrills. SFIII is deeper and more complex.

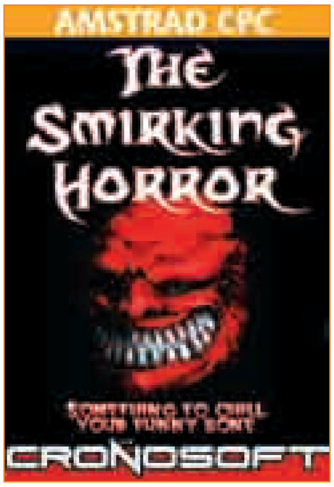
Addictiveness 87%
Street Fighter fans will keep coming back for more.

Overall 90%
A great value collection for the Xbox, with SFIII making a welcome appearance. Where's the original?





The Smirking Horror



Programmer:	**Jason Davies**
Price:	**£1.99**
Format:	**Amstrad CPC**

Created using the Graphics Adventure Creator but without graphics, this is the first of a trio of adventures lined up for release by Cronosoft for the Amstrad CPC.

The Smirking Horror is set in the P.U.E. (Phillip Urwin Edwards) Tech in Cambridge Massachusetts. The campus will be familiar territory to those who have played The Lurking Horror, Dave Lebling's classic Infocom text adventure set in the G.U.E. (George Underwood Edwards) Tech. It has a similar layout: a computer centre, great dome, alchemy department, and long corridors both above and below ground, complete with a sinister floor polisher. Likewise, there are some very nasty things going on.

You are there to complete your college assignment, but you get trapped inside the building while a blizzard rages outside. However, you're not able to use a terminal, as it seems the power to the computer centre is down. Upon investigation, this appears to be due to sabotage... Thus, your objective changes from completing your assignment, to dealing with an evil monster that has taken over the building.

Many of the problems encountered throughout the game are the same as in the original, but some have different and less elegant solutions. Unfortunately, not only are many of the solutions not very intuitive and more likely to be solved, if at all, by chance than by logic, they also have illogical constraints to solving them. A good example of this is how to get rid of Arthur, the floor polisher who is blocking your way. A most unlikely weapon is involved. You have to make it, as it does not actually exist. But the trouble is it's not an object you would normally consider using to attack someone with. Worse still, should you realise you need to make it, you have to enter a 'wait' sequence. However, this sequence will not trigger the making of the object unless you have first examined something, and then read the inscription on it that is thus revealed, neither of which outcomes have anything to do with the problem in hand.

Very few Amstrad owners would have played The Lurking Horror in 1991 when this was written, and a spoof is not a spoof unless you recognise it as a take off. So why was Smirking written? If it was written to try to bring a cassette-based Lurking Horror lookalike to the Amstrad, then the author was on a hiding to nothing. It would be nigh impossible to approach the richness and sheer verbosity of Infocom's text on a cassette. It also lacks the sparkle that master spoofer, Fergus McNeill, injected into many of his games, like The Boggit and Bugsy. Smirking Horror runs (as far as I could tell) bug free, has no noticeable typos, and is put together competently enough. Perhaps that says it all.

So who is going to buy it now, some 13 years on? In the 80s, plenty of dire Spectrum Quill'd adventures sold for £5 to £10, so at £1.99 you really can't go wrong. Despite much of the foregoing, The Smirking Horror is exceptionally good value for money if you have a real Amstrad that is hungry for software to justify its continued presence in your computer room. Just don't expect a masterpiece, that's all.

If you have a PC as well as that old Amstrad, and haven't



ever tried the real thing (The Lurking Horror) then I would recommend giving it a go after you have played this one – but not before. Just Google for it and you'll find it downloadable for free without too much difficulty, together with its complete manual in PDF format. And Googling for 'Infocom invisiclues' will get you out of trouble without having to write to an Adventure Helpline...

Keith Campbell

Graphics	**n/a**
Sound	**n/a**
Playability	**76%**
Reasonably fast parser; mostly intelligent replies.	
Addictiveness	**55%**
You'll probably want to continue until completed, although you'll need a few coffees to keep you going.	
Overall	**65%**
Reasonable in its own right, but bound to compare unfavourably with the original.	





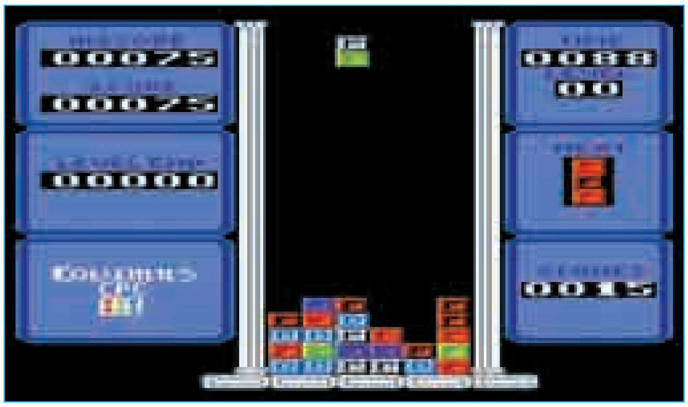
Columns CPC

Developer: ESP Software
Price: Free Download
Format: Amstrad CPC

Columns CPC is a faithful port of Sega's popular Tetris clone. Three randomly selected gems fall from the top of the screen, and your task is to quickly match them up and sort them into columns or rows of three or more, either as a true vertical column or in a horizontal or diagonal row. The graphics aren't great, but then they don't need to be as the gameplay is timeless.

From the main menu you can select from three difficulty levels and two different game types. In the first of these, it's a simple case of racking up as many points as possible, gaining extra time as you match four or more gems. In the second, you are given a score to equal before you can progress to the next level. There is a time limit in the top right hand corner, and once you've met the score criteria, you're given a bonus and moved onto the next stage. Again, matching four or more gems will add valuable seconds to the clock. You start the next level with the same time as you finished the last one, plus 10 or 20 seconds depending on how far into the game you are. A new score criteria is given, in relation to your score from the previous level. The difficulty curve is quite steep, but occasionally luck will help you out.

Fans of the original will feel at home with Columns CPC, but we found it a little unforgiving from the start. Give it a little time and initial frustration may dissipate, but it's definitely one for fans of the genre rather than the average gamer. The disk image can be downloaded from **www.computeremuzone.com**.
Mike Davies



Graphics 70%
Functional graphics used throughout. Nice loading screen though.

Sound 80%
A title screen tune and interlude music between the levels. Reasonable in-game sound effects.

Playability 75%
Fast thinking and forward planning is required.

Addictiveness 75%
Like any falling block game, it can be difficult to drag yourself away.

Overall 75%
A decent port of a great puzzle game. Doesn't quite challenge the mighty Tetris.

Reaxion

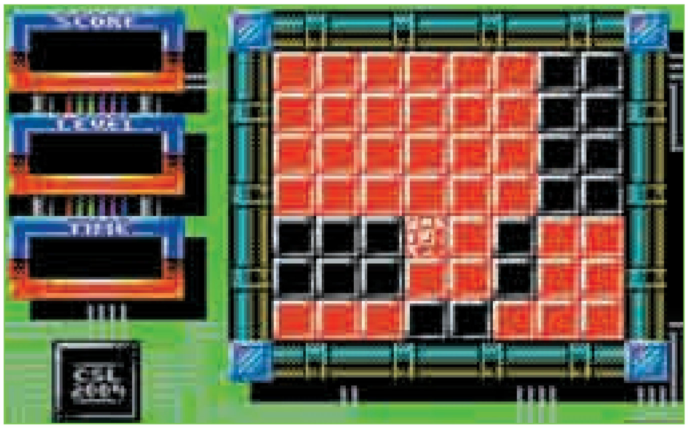
Developer: Cosine Designs
Price: TBA
Machine: Spectrum

For those of you who may have missed Retro Gamer issue five, Reaxion is a game originally written by Jason Kelk and Glen Rune of Cosine Designs, then improved and released on the Commodore 64 under the Cronosoft banner earlier this year. With Reaxion being ported to the Spectrum, it represents how the retro community is gradually coming together, which will surely be beneficial for everyone, and is also the first straight C64 to Spectrum port (to our mind) for over a decade.

The idea behind the game is that a nuclear power plant has reached the point where total meltdown is delicately balanced on a knife-edge, and the only way to avert this pending catastrophe is to reset all 99 of the nuclear rods using a high-tech software interface. The mainframe has failed, and the only option left is to use the trusty ZX Spectrum.

On starting, you are given a visual representation of each rod and every point of it needs to be reset. However, any manipulation of a point has a knock-on effect to the surrounding eight, inverting their current state, meaning that logic is required to progress. When you've cleared an entire rod, it's onto the next. As you work your way through the levels the task becomes more intricate.

This is a solid port of the C64 version, with great graphics and AY music. The playability, learning curve and puzzles are just as good as the original, and is certainly recommended for fans of puzzle games. Keep an eye on **www.cronosoft.co.uk** for price and release details.
Shaun Bebbington



Graphics 82%
Well drawn and colourful, although nothing spectacular.

Sound 90%
A great AY tune accompanies play.

Playability 85%
An easy game to get into, requiring thought and patience.

Addictiveness 80%
Good learning curve. One for those who enjoy puzzle games.

Overall 83%
A fun, frantic puzzler, and another great little title from Cronosoft.

Leaderboard

HALL OF FAME

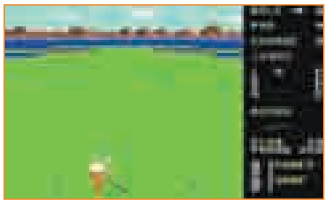
Developer:	Access Software
Year of release:	1986
Format:	Commodore 64

As well as being one of the few golf games on the Commodore 64, Leaderboard is the only golf game (to my knowledge) that made it to cartridge as well as the standard of tape and disk.

On loading the game you are presented with the options screen. From here you can select one to four players, with each entering their name. You then select a level of difficulty between Novice, Amateur or Professional, and the number of holes that you want to play being 18, 36, 54 or 72. Finally you pick which golf course you want. There are four to choose from varying in shape and size.

The control method is easily accessible for even the most novice of gamers. Up and down cycles through the available golf clubs, each of which have their own attributes. Left and right moves the crosshair which influences the direction in which your ball will travel, depending on the wind direction and speed.

The clubs available allow varying distances for your shot, further controlled by carefully setting the power bar for a more precise hit.



After every shot the computer calculates your position on the course and redraws the screen accordingly. For such an old routine it's incredibly fast and there's hardly any pause at all. The 3D engine is still effective today, and the game as a whole is as playable as ever.

Leaderboard spawned its own mini-series, with Executive Leaderboard and World Class Leaderboard following soon after. My only gripe (with the original) is that the colour scheme is limited, meaning no sand bunkers or trees, and there is no 2D map either, but these would later feature in the aforementioned follow-ups, and takes nothing away from this classic C64 title. Certainly worth adding to anyone's collection.



Wayne Womersley

Graphics 85%
Nice backdrops and brilliantly animated main sprites with a great 3D engine.

Sound 69%
Reasonable spot effects during play.

Playability 92%
Lots of fun to be had, especially when four players are involved.

Addictiveness 88%
A very high one more go factor as you master each skill level.

Overall 90%
The original 3D golfing game for the C64. Still a great sports sim even by today's standards.

Kick Off

HALL OF SHAME

Developer:	Anco
Year of release:	1989
Format:	Commodore 64

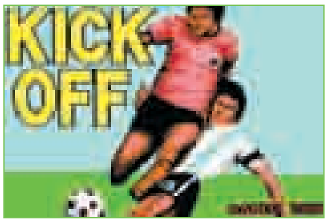
Kick Off was one of those football games from the late 80s that managed to amass many fans, and its creator Dino Dini was rightly praised for his original work. Playability was what gave the Amiga version in particular first-division status, with masses of options and simple but effective graphics.

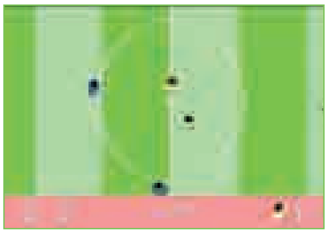
Six months after the Amiga game came the Commodore 64 version, with seemingly all the same options as its big brother. You could play against the computer or human in a friendly, or alternatively up to eight teams (human or computer controlled) could compete in a league situation. Surely then it couldn't fail? But sadly, it did. And the nasty graphics and laughable sound were just the start of it. The most obvious difference between this and the original Amiga game was that the screen scrolled horizontally rather then vertically. Other changes included the inability to stop and pass, and the omission of a player radar so you couldn't pinpoint your passes.

Worse still, the Spectrum port of Kick Off was actually closer to the original 16-bit version. Despite receiving a mixed reception from the popular press, it was actually a much better game than the measly C64 effort. No sane person could deny this, and as a C64 fan, it was a difficult thing to admit, and is even to this day.

Anco released a real turkey just in time for Christmas 1989, but I don't mean in a good way. There was no stuffing, bacon-wrapped mini sausages or any of the lush extras with this version of the game. Put simply, the disappointment of it bearing the name of an Amiga classic was almost criminal.

James Bray





Graphics 40%
Poorly defined with slow moving sprites.

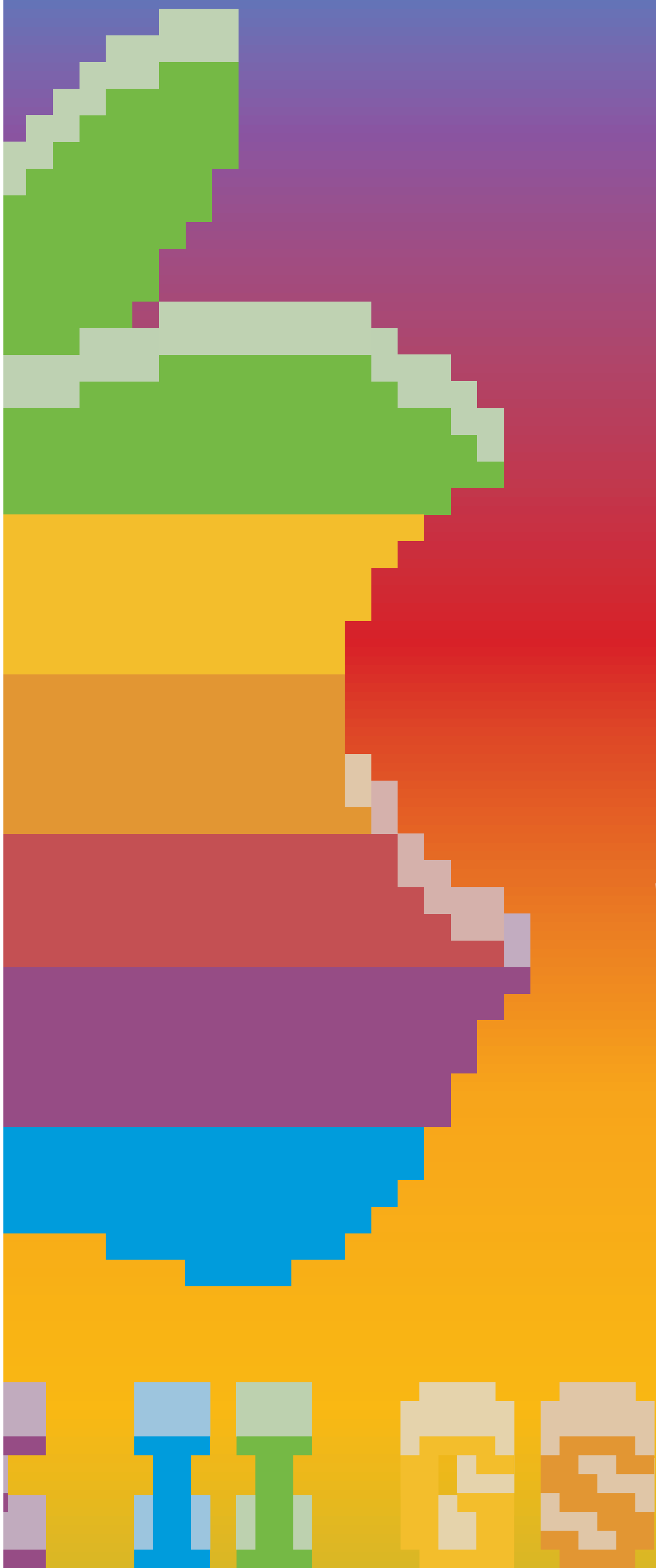
Sound 25%
To say that the sound effects ar sparse and dull would be generous.

Playability 33%
A frustrating game, requiring more luck than skill.

Addictiveness 36%
There's nothing really to keep you coming back.

Overall 34%
There are far better footy games for the C64. A very poor relative of the Amiga version.





>Apple II Forever

Released in 1986, the Apple IIGS was the pinnacle of the phenomenally successful Apple II line. With its 16-bit processor and amazing sound capabilities, it was to dominate the emerging 16-bit era, but as Jason Walsh discovers, it didn't quite go according to plan

In the mid to late 80s, the popularity of 16-bit computers was beginning to rise rapidly, with the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga leading the charge. The Apple II, introduced in 1978, sold in huge numbers, eventually coming to possess a 20% share of the personal computer market in the US. But by 1985 the era of the 8-bits was coming to an end. While Apple's Macintosh was running rings around the IBM PC, in terms of usability if not sales, Apple decided on a different strategy to deal with the 16-bit home computer market. The Apple IIGS was Apple's answer to Commodore and Atari's next-generation machines.

Apple core

The Apple story began in 1976 when two phone phreakers decided to build a computer. These small-time criminals were both named Steve. Steve Wozniak was the visionary engineer who designed the machine soon to be called the Apple I, while Steve Jobs was the man who saw the commercial potential of computers in the home. Aside from ripping-off phone companies, the pair had legitimate engineering jobs – Wozniak was working at Hewlett-Packard and Jobs at Atari.

It was in Jobs' garage that Wozinak designed the Apple I computer. After offering it to HP, who turned it down, Apple was formed to sell the machine. It was marketed in 1976 at a price of US$666. The Apple I was the first single-board computer with a built-in video interface and on-board ROM (which told the machine how to load programs from an external source). Jobs was marketing the Apple I at hobbyists like the members of the Homebrew Computer Club, but when he and Wozinak sat down to design the Apple II, he had grander plans.

In 1977 Apple unveiled the Apple II, the first colour-capable microcomputer. The company strongly encouraged third-party software development and by 1983, there was a library of 16,000 software programs for the machine. The Apple II set the standard in personal computers and was an enormous success. Within three years the company had made a profit of $139 million – a 700% growth. Apple went public in 1980 with an initial offering of $22 per share, but the price went up to $29 on the first day of trading. At the end of the first day, Apple had a value of $1.8 billion, the biggest initial public offering since Ford. Jobs alone was worth $250 million.

By 1984, Apple's loyal users were hungry for a new machine. Despite having been revised several times, the Apple II was showing its age. The Apple Mac, meanwhile, was too expensive for home use, and while it featured a high-resolution display, it was monochrome. When you consider that the Apple II was the first computer capable of colour graphics, there was no way the Apple II user-base would settle for a mono machine. In 1984, Apple had released the Apple IIc, but this was still an 8-bit computer. Its main selling point was that it was portable. It had a tiny form factor and Apple released an LCD screen and battery pack for it, making it a very capable laptop. It sold in high quantities, but users were hungry for more power. The planned successor was codenamed, variously, Cortland, Phoenix, Rambo, Gumby and Mark Twain.

BeginninGS

To the acclaim of its fans, Apple unveiled the IIGS in September 1986. The new machine's case



The original Apple II. Launched in 1977, the line was still officially supported by Apple up until 1996



The tiny Apple IIc, seen here with its specially designed LCD display



Despite being a typical desktop computer, the IIGS still bagged Apple several design awards

was designed by the then head of the Apple Industrial Design Unit, Harmut Esslinger. Esslinger wanted the IIGS to be an integrated unit like the Apple II, Amiga and ST, but with a 'hammerhead' look – the machine would be much smaller than the keyboard. In the end Apple executives pushed for a desktop design. The keyboard was full-sized typewriter style, but is notable because it had a small form factor similar to early iMac keyboards, and because it introduced the Apple Desktop Bus serial connection (a feature which remained standard on all Apple machines until 1997).

The machine was pricey at $999 plus $399 for a 3.5in floppy drive, or $299 for a 5.25in drive. A colour monitor cost a further $499, or $129 for a mono green screen. Apple also sold a SCSI card for the machine, allowing it to power external hard drives and an Apple-branded CD-ROM drive. The SCSI card could even be used to power more modern equipment such as Zip and Jaz drives from the 1990s.

Despite the cost, the IIGS performed well initially, outselling the Mac at the time of launch, but this early success was not to be continued. Apple did not seriously market the machine and it was eventually outsold by the Amiga and Mac. Outside of North America the machine made some impact in France, but Apple's sky-high prices in comparison to those of Commodore and Atari hampered the machine in Europe. An Amiga could be had for almost half the price of a IIGS.

Unlike the Amiga, ST and Mac (which were powered by the 16-bit chip of choice, the Motorola 68000), the Apple IIGS used the Western Digital 65C816. The key reason for choosing this CPU was that it was fully 16-bit and yet also backwards compatible with the MOS 6502 processor used in the older 8-bit Apple II range. For Apple this was a key decision. Without the ability to run Apple II software, the IIGS could not have been considered a member of the Apple II family. The emulation worked admirably – approximately 99% of 8-bit Apple II software ran on the IIGS, often faster than on the earlier machines.

Originally a selling point for the machine, 8-bit compatibility became a millstone around the 16-bit machine's neck. Some developers saw the machine as an opportunity to rehash barely updated 8-bit software. In turn this resulted in some potential buyers not bothering with upgrading to the new machine. One such poor game was Paperboy. Failing to take advantage of the advanced technology in the IIGS, Mindscape produced a fun game, but one which would not have looked out of place on the Commodore 64 or 8-bit Apple.

Sweet music

Two computers from the 16-bit era are remembered for their music – the Amiga for its excellent sound output, and the Atari ST for its onboard MIDI ports. Few people remember the Apple IIGS for its audio capabilities, despite the fact that it easily competed with the Amiga. Moreover, the IIGS blew the Atari ST, with its ancient Yamaha YM 2149 (a clone of the General Instruments AY-3-8912 chip found in 8-bit Amstrad CPCs, Spectrum Plus machines and MSX computers), out of the water.

The IIGS featured an Ensoniq 5503 Digital Oscillator, a music synthesiser chip capable of wavetable synthesis. Remember, this was in 1986. In fact, the IIGS had 64Kb of dedicated RAM separate from main RAM reserved solely for waveforms. The Ensoniq chip was capable of 32 voices, paired in the firmware to offer 15 voices as standard, with two reserved for timing.

The chip was so good that it drew a lawsuit from the Beatles, similar to the one that the band is currently prosecuting against Apple's iPod MP3 player and GarageBand software. In order to call themselves Apple, Jobs and Wozniak agreed with the Beatles' lawyers that they would stay out of the music business, so as not to cause confusion between the nascent computer manufacturer and the Beatles' record label, Apple Corps. The result was costly for Apple and it never again put a synthesiser chip in any of its computers. Even today's Macs, the favourite platform of digital musicians, do not feature hardware synthesisers.

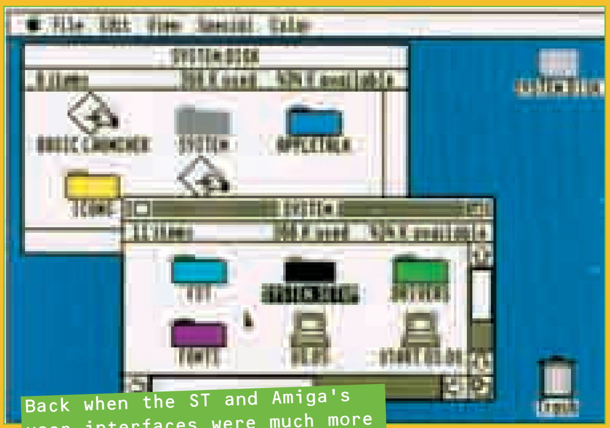
Without a doubt, the IIGS was

>The GUI

When the IIGS was launched it came with ProDOS 16, a version of the upgraded Apple II's operating system. But with its command-based interface, ProDOS was not deemed good enough for the Apple IIGS. Facing stiff competition from the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST, Apple decided to create a fully featured graphical user interface for its 16-bit consumer machine. The result was GS/OS.

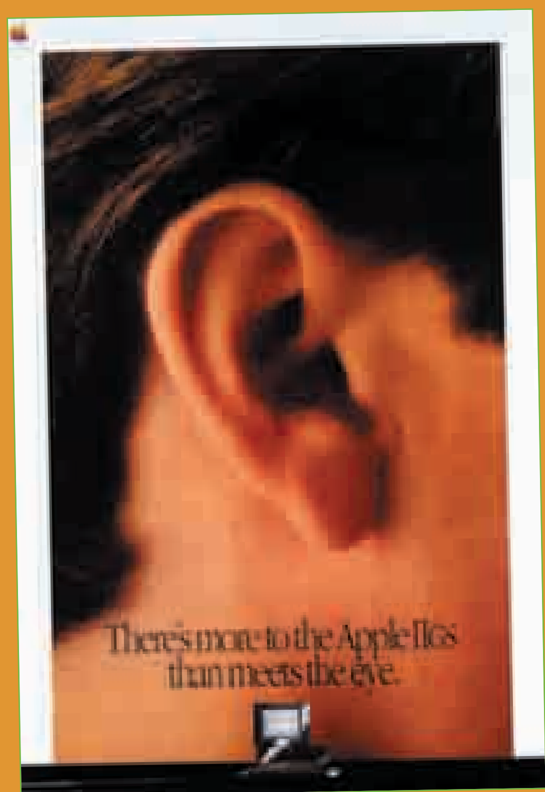
Apple did an excellent job, which was hardly surprising considering it brought point and click to the masses with the Macintosh. Though the underlying OS lacked the sophistication of the technically superior Amiga OS, or indeed the Mac, the GUI outshone those of both the Amiga and ST, if not quite reaching Macintosh-like sophistication.

GS/OS included a technology known as File System Translators which allowed it to elegantly support multiple on-disk file systems in a manner transparent to application programs – something most other operating systems at the time were incapable of doing. GS/OS also featured support for disks formatted for the Mac's HFS file system. as well as DOS disks from the PC – very handy considering the IIGS used both 3.5in and 5.25in floppies. Mac interpolability went even further than merely supporting disks – GS/OS used resource and data forks in its files, just like the Mac, allowing for file extensions to be done away with.



Back when the ST and Amiga's user interfaces were much more of a concern than Microsoft Windows, Apple developed GS/OS to drive its new machine





A couple of ads highlighting the IIGS's advanced audio capabilities

the most powerful of all the 16-bit machines when it came to sound and music. It was much more advanced that the ST or Amiga and even some PC soundcards from the 1990s. So what went wrong? Why isn't the Apple IIGS remembered for its sound capabilities?

Apple crippled it. The Ensoniq chip had an 8-bit sound resolution and was even capable of recording audio, but Apple fitted the machine with mono headphone jack. If a user wanted stereo input or output from the machine, they had to purchase expensive third-party hardware which could de-multiplex the stereo signal already there and input sound.

Crippleware

This curtailing technique was to become familiar to users of the IIGS. Desperate not to see Mac sales cannibalised, Apple imposed some severe hardware and software limitations on the IIGS, crippling the machine.

Compared to the Amiga and the Atari ST, which ran at 7MHz and 8MHz respectively, the Apple IIGS ran at a mere 2.8MHz. But speed wasn't the only thing to take a hit. The IIGS was able to display 32,000 colours at a resolution of 320x200, yet Apple adjusted the machine's firmware, limiting it to 16 colours. Thankfully, enterprising programmers managed to get around Apple's restrictions.

Apple's tinkering did not end there because firmware revisions were a problem for the IIGS. Apple revised the ROMs several times to improve the computer, but this often had a negative effect on software, especially games which often used undocumented features of the ROMs. Dan Knight, now the publisher of a successful commercial webzine dedicated to retro Macs, was a salesman at a Heath-Zenith store which sold the entire Apple II range. Retro Gamer spoke to him about the hardware problems faced by users: "The IIGS seemed to be as trouble free as any other Apple II series computer. The biggest customer complaint was the way Apple would make big ROM revisions. Customers would have to bring their IIGS in to the shop, the technician had to install the new ROM, and then the customer would go home to discover how many of their games no longer worked.

"So Apple redid the ROMs again to address that – a whole other cycle of replacements – and then some of the games and other programs that had been updated for the second ROM were broken. Really bad move. One of the lessons Apple learned from this was to put a second ROM slot in a lot of Macs over the years. That way it was a simple matter of plugging in a new ROM if there were some defect or some new feature that they might want to add to the computer. We're spoiled today – modern computers can be updated without ever having to enter the shop. Buyers got pretty ticked at the way Apple kept revising the ROMs, breaking software, doing it again…"

ROM problems aside, Knight acknowledges that the IIGS real hardware problems were by design: "The IIGS would've been a real sweet machine if they hadn't slowed down the CPU to prevent cutting into Mac sales. Most customers didn't know what to make of it. It was definitely the ultimate Apple II, and it acted a lot like a Mac, but the lower resolution colour screen, slow floppies, and crippled CPU kept it from being all it could have been. It was a wonderful games machine though, and the Ensoniq sound chip was excellent."

Gaming guru

As Knight says, the IIGS was a very capable gaming platform, with a number of impressive software titles appearing on the machine. One of the best-loved



To protect its prestigious Mac computer, Apple chose to curtail the capabilities of the IIGS



Pangea Soft's Xenocide was one of a number of games designed exclusively for the IIGS

games was Xenocide, a dedicated IIGS title developed by Brian Greenstone and sold by Pangea Soft. Greenstone was to go on to become a Super Nintendo and PlayStation developer at Mindscape and Visual Concepts.

Xenocide was a shoot-em-up with a difference, although the plot was as minimal as ever with this sort of game. Aliens had infested the moons of the planet Talos IV, and your job was to stop them taking over the planet by destroying the moons. The first level is a pseudo-3D Space Harrier-like race to arrive on the surface of the moon. Later levels include side-scrolling and top-down views, offering a remarkable variety of gameplay.

Pangea Soft remains a presence in the industry to this day. In the late 1990s, Greenstone's games Bugdom, Nanosaur and Cro Mag Rally became legendary and were even bundled by with iMacs and iBooks by Apple. In fact, Greenstone is something of a pioneer – he programmed Bungie's Weekend Warrior, the first 100% 3D game on the Mac. Retro Gamer caught up with Greenstone. We asked him if he had any fond memories of the IIGS. "I know that somewhere I still have my 'Woz' Edition certificate that I got when I bought the IIGS. I'm not sure what made it a special edition though. I can barely even remember what the machine looked like. I traded mine to a friend in exchange for a filing cabinet about, oh, 10 years ago."

On the question of whether it was a worthy competitor to the more popular ST and Amiga, Greenstone is adamant that the Apple was superior: "Oh, yes. I think it was better than those. I remember that there were some amazing demos from the FTL guys in France, but I don't know if they ever built a game from any of those." As for his own games, how did thy fare in the marketplace? "The shareware stuff sold really well considering it cost nothing to make. Xenocide did well too, but the IIGS market was so small back then that it's hard to compare with the way things are today. Selling 4,000 copies of something was considered pretty good."

Greenstone releases his games as freeware, once they are no longer commercially viable. This includes Xenocide and the once-shareware Senseless Violence and Cosmocade. We asked him why. "Because nobody was going to pay for them, so I figured why not? We haven't freewared anything new in a long time. I think Weekend Warrior was the

>The Japanese connection

Motorola Semiconductor had a good time during the 16-bit revolution of the late 80s and early 90s. The Commodore Amiga, Atari ST, Apple Mac, Sega Megadrive, Sinclair QL and countless arcade machines and UNIX workstations were all built around its 680000-series CPU. Even the 64-bit Atari Jaguar featured it as a secondary chip.

Apple could easily have based the IIGS on the very capable 68k chip – after all, this was two years after the launch of the Mac and three years after the Apple Lisa, both of which featured the CPU – but the Apple IIGS was designed to follow on from the 8-bit Apple II line, so Apple needed a CPU which was backwards compatible with the MOS 6502 used in the older machines. To that end, the Apple IIGS centred on a Western Digital 65C816, a 16-bit microprocessor developed by the Western Design Center. Still in production today, it is an expanded successor to the 6502. The chip has two 16-bit index registers, a stack pointer, a 16-bit direct page register, and a 24-bit address bus.

Apple was not the only company with an eye on this familiar technology. In the late 1980s, Nintendo was in the process of developing a successor to its Famicon console. The Famicon was based on the a Ricoh clone of the 6502, so when it came to design the Super Famicon, Masayuki Uemura knew where to look for a CPU. In November 1990 Nintendo released the console in Japan, appearing a year later in Europe and the US as the Super Nintendo. The system featured a Western Digital 65C816 CPU, although it was not backwards compatible with the 8-bit NES, perhaps due in part to witnessing Apple's sales woes inflicted by near-perfect backward compatibility.

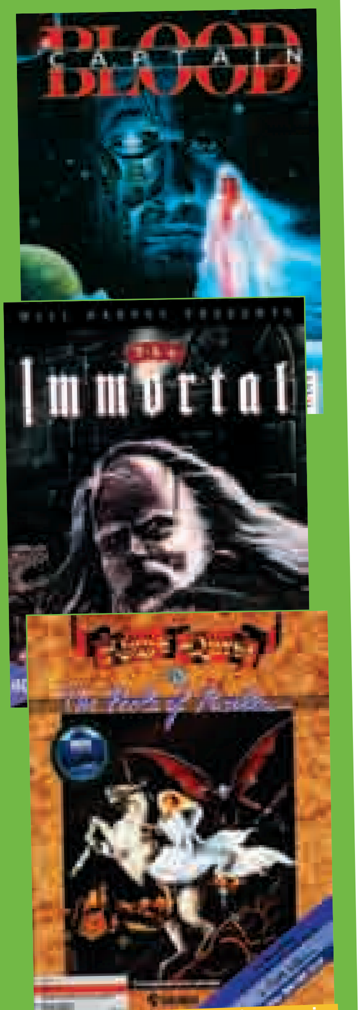
At least one IIGS developer took advantage of the similarities between the systems. Xenocide author Brian Greenstone remembers: "I was already writing software for my Apple II+ which was the first computer I ever owned, so when I upgraded to the IIGS it seemed like a natural next step. The great thing about that decision was that the IIGS uses the 65816 processor, and that happened to be the same processor that the Super Nintendo used, so getting a job making Nintendo games was really easy."

In the early days of the SNES, Nintendo used the Apple IIGS for development purposes. After a while though, the IIGS couldn't keep up with emulating the advanced graphics capabilities of the SNES, so Nintendo developed an emulator and development system for the Macintosh. Interestingly, a few years later the two principal developers of the Mac-based emulation system left Nintendo and announced that they were going to develop a commercial SNES emulator for the Mac. As it never appeared, we can only assume that Nintendo's legal department wasn't too enamoured with the idea.

Although the SNES was discontinued in 1997, the Japanese Super Famicom version continued in production until last year, proving beyond a doubt that whatever problems the Apple IIGS may have had, they weren't located in the CPU.



The Super Nintendo featured the same processor as the IIGS, and Nintendo even used the computer for development purposes



Publishers including Electronic Arts, Infogrames and Sierra all catered for the computer's gaming market

last game that went freeware."

Of course, it wasn't all Apple II-only games. The IIGS saw many popular titles ported to it including Arkanoid, the Bard's Tale, The Last Ninja, Rastan, Captain Blood, Hostages, The Immortal and Dungeon Master. One intriguing game for the IIGS was Ancient Land of Ys. Ys will be familiar to fans of Japanese role-playing games on platforms like the Super Nintendo and PC Engine. Ys was a Zelda-like top-down role-playing game, but unlike the turn-based Western RPGs popular on the Apple, such as Pools of Radiance or the Bard's Tale, Ys features console-style action.

Open up

Apple has a reputation for developing 'closed systems' – the original Mac was not expandable and even the recent iMacs are similarly single-unit machines with little in the way of internal expandability. However, the Apple II was one of the most expandable computers ever. The fact that the original Mac was un-expandable is a function of its design – Steve Jobs wanted to make computers that anyone could use, so marketing them as standalone appliances was a natural decision. The Apple II had an altogether different history. Designed by Steve Wozniak, the original Apple II was the successor to the Apple I, a computer which was sold in kit form.

When designing the original Apple II back in 1977, Wozniak included seven built-in slots for peripheral cards. Not only that, he configured the machine so that each card could incorporate built-in software on its own ROM chip. This previously unheard of flexibility allowed the Apple II to be adapted to a wide range of applications, and spawned a thriving third-party hardware industry. When Apple was preparing the IIGS it seemed only natural to follow the design of the original Apple II and thus the 16-bit machine featured the same seven expansion ports.

The basic expansion was a very popular RAM upgrade. The machine originally came with 256Kb RAM onboard and could handle up to 8Mb of memory, but as memory was so expensive most users settled for between 1Mb and 4Mb. Other expansions included hard drive controllers, SCSI adaptors, and the Transwarp GS and ZipGS accelerator cards.

Some 'super' expansion cards were also released. Using power from all seven of the slots, these cards often had advanced functionality. One of the most advanced cards was the LANceGS Ethernet card which allowed the IIGS to connect to advanced modern networks, including broadband Internet. The original version of the card, released in 1991, featured its own onboard 6502 processor. The second revision of the card contains a 4MHz 65C816 processor – the same processor as the IIGS itself, making it a sort of dual CPU machine – and 64Kb of dedicated RAM for card use. The card also featured 128Kb of ROM that was paged in four banks and contained the firmware to handle the AppleTalk protocols. The card is still manufactured and is sold by SSH Systeme in Germany.

Serious software

Just as Apple did its best to make sure that games were not developed for the Macintosh system, it also attempted to limit the range of serious software on the IIGS to products aimed at the home and education markets. Despite this, one application was developed which arguably could have been a threat to the Mac's primary market of desktop publishing.

Timeworks Publish-It, popular on the Atari ST under the name of Timeworks DTP, was released for the IIGS in January 1998. Fortunately for Apple, the Mac was already entrenched in the publishing industry and there was a public perception that the IIGS could not drive PostScript devices. Another good piece of graphics software included Deluxe Paint II, EA's popular bitmap editor on the Amiga.

One productivity application which is worthy of note is AppleWorks GS. AppleWorks GS was the first integrated productivity suite – later packages such as Claris Works and Microsoft Works were taking their cues from the IIGS program. One other notable serious application on the platform included the GS version of Apple's multimedia development package HyperCard. HyperCard was a revolutionary piece of software which allowed anyone to make applications. The adventure game Myst was developed using HyperCard on a Mac.

Apple of thine eye

Despite the fact that Apple officially ended production of the computer in 1992, the IIGS continues to exist to this day. There is still a thriving



Apple's HyperCard application enabled users to develop multimedia projects



Unusual upgrades – the 'Woz' Limited Edition and an Apple IIe fitted with a IIGS motherboard

marketplace for the Apple IIGS, particularly on eBay (as the machine was not particularly popular outside of its native America, it's best to log on to the US site). The current going price for IIGS machines is between $25 for a base unit, and up to $99 for a complete machine with monitor, disk drive and a collection of software.

Look out for rare versions such as the 'Woz' Limited Edition which features Steve Wozniak's signature on the case, or the special Apple IIe upgraded machines. These were ordinary IIe machines which had had their motherboard replaced with the 16-bit IIGS board, and are quite rare. The upgraded IIe models came with a certificate of authenticity and a letter from Steve Wozniak. Included with the upgraded board was the IIGS system software and a IIGS nameplate which replaced the IIe plate on the case. Several retailers are still shipping used, reconditioned and occasionally, unused, Apple IIGS machines, notably Sun Remarketing, who do a roaring trade in obscure Apple hardware.

Apple has a history of orphaning entire ranges of machines – the Lisa, Apple's UNIX servers and the Newton were all abandoned by the company in favour of the Macintosh. Some users refused to accept Apple's decisions and continued to develop software and hardware for the ancient machines. Two French programmers, Olivier Zardini and Antoine Vignau, released an unofficial port of the Pysgnosis classic Lemmings in 1996 under the moniker Brutal Deluxe Software. The name of the game? LemminGS, of course. Never sold commercially, the game was given away for free to anyone who purchased a copy of its graphics software, Convert 3200. Other unofficial clones included a version of Nintendo's Dr. Mario – in this case the Nintendo franchise was perhaps fair game as Nintendo's effort was nothing short of a rip-off of Tetris. One of the most remarkable, and this time entirely legitimate, conversions was Logicware's faithful version of Wolfenstein 3D.

All is not a bed of roses for the remaining IIGS owners. Apple's legendary build quality means that countless thousands of machines are still in working order, but if they're ever booted up these days it's most likely to be as an exercise in nostalgia. Kula Software, a consultancy firm based in Hawaii, had at one point a profitable sideline in supporting the orphaned Apple II series. When Retro Gamer spoke to Mike Ching, the principal of the firm, he admitted that the computer is no longer in any demand: "My Apple II business is pretty much dead. I haven't sold much Apple II merchandise for years. About the only thing it seems I've been selling occasionally are old magazines to collectors."

For years Apple had marketed the II series with the slogan 'Apple II forever'. By the early 1990s no-one believed it anymore. It had become clear that the future belonged to the Macintosh. In March 1987 Apple had introduced the Macintosh II with a high-resolution colour screen and plenty of space for internal expansion, but at $5,500 it was no threat to the cheaper IIGS. Then in October 1990, Apple debuted a new low-cost colour Mac, the LC, at $2,500. Aimed squarely at the education and home markets, the writing was on the wall for the IIGS.

In the end, the IIGS was outlasted by its little 8-bit brother, the Apple IIe, a machine which had its roots in Steve Jobs' garage back in 1977. The IIGS ceased production in 1992 when Apple wound up the entire Apple II unit and merged it into its legacy support department. The 8-bit Apple IIe staggered on for another year without any marketing whatsoever. Apple continued to support the IIe until 1996 because many developers were still using it for 6502 code testing. RG*



The final nail in the coffin? The IIGS was phased out following the launch of the Macintosh LC

>Rotten apple

Apple's position as the only serious commercial competitor to Microsoft guarantees that every move the company makes is documented, and often distorted. Apple had, over the years, a few models which failed to live up to sales expectations – the Apple IIGS being a case in point, but there are other examples such as the Newton PDA, the PowerMac G4 Cube and the Macintosh XL. These computers are often portrayed in the press as failures, and while in most cases that's an exaggeration, there is one particular machine lurking in Apple's Cupertino headquarters that the company would prefer to forget. Introducing the Apple III...

Where as the IIGS was a successful product which failed to achieve all that it could have, the earlier Apple III was an unmitigated disaster. It was stillborn – a doomed machine from the beginning. Launched in 1980 and priced around $5,000 with a monitor, hard drive and printer, not only was the Apple III mind-crunchingly expensive, it was made with none of the passion of the Apple II or Macintosh. Instead it was designed to be a stop-gap machine until Apple's long-term projects – the Lisa and Macintosh – could be realised.

In 1977 Apple had the microcomputer market almost entirely to itself. No other manufacturer produced computers in anything other than kit form. By 1980 Apple was facing stiff competition from other computer manufacturers such as Atari, Tandy Radio Shack and Commodore. Worse still, Apple knew that IBM was due to debut its own machine the following year. The Apple II's success was in part due to one piece of software, Visicalc. This was the first ever spreadsheet and it had become a killer application, guaranteeing the Apple II a place in businesses the world over. Apple knew that IBM would pursue this market aggressively. As a result, the company's management pushed for the engineers to develop a new machine, a kind of super Apple II which was more suited to business applications.

Three's a crowd

Announced on May 19th, 1980, during the National Computer Conference in Anaheim, California, the Apple III shipped in the autumn of that year. It ran twice as fast as the Apple II and had 128Kb of RAM – twice as much memory as the Apple II. The Apple III was the first Apple computer to have a built-in floppy drive – a Shugart 5.25in floppy drive which could store 143Kb of data.

The machine was codenamed Sara, after Steve Jobs' daughter, and used a powerful operating system called SOS, standing for Sara's Operating System (later changed to Sophisticated Operating System). SOS featured an advanced memory management system and was device independent. The OS was the only thing to be salvaged from the Apple III debacle, forming the basis of the upgraded OS for the Apple II – ProDOS. Some parts of SOS eventually made their way into the Lisa and Mac OS code bases.

The case design is probably the most noteworthy aspect of the Apple III, not only because it is unusually ugly by Apple's standards, but because it is deeply flawed from an engineering perspective. The entire US computer industry was waiting on new guidelines on electromagnetic radiation from the Federal Communications Commission, but Apple decided that it couldn't wait for the FCC, so the Apple III's designer, Jerry Manock, decided to make the III 'bulletproof'. Underneath the computer's beige plastic case lay a cast aluminium chassis that shielded the computer from interference. The chassis, produced by a Toledo-based car parts manufacturer, was so massive that it would pass the most stringent emissions tests in the world.

Unfortunately, this was an expensive and unwieldy solution. Steve Jobs had insisted that the machine should have no fan, so the chassis became a heat sink. It didn't work properly and the machine often got so hot that chips would pop out of place. Apple told customers to lift the system several inches above their desks and drop it to reseat the chips.

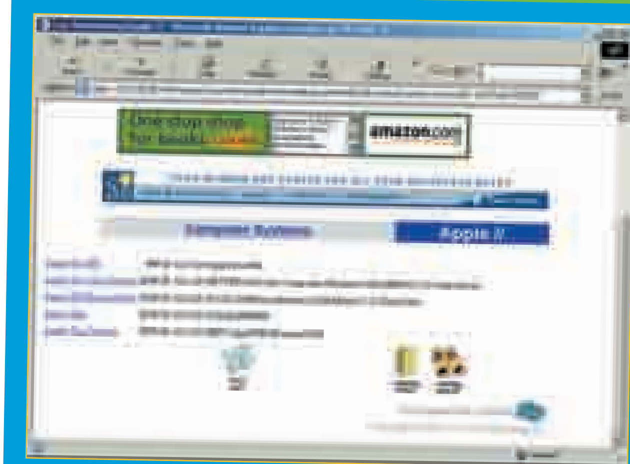
Other problems included the fact that the machine was sold as compatible with the Apple II, while in reality it was only partially compatible. One of the design team, Randy Wigginton, puts the machine's flaws down to a combination of 'feature creep' and the fact that it was "designed by committee. Everybody had ideas about what the III should do... and all of them were included."

Apple attempted to keep the machine alive by beefing up the memory to 256Kb and fixing the case problems, to no avail. The machine was quietly discontinued in September 1985.



The ill-fated Apple III was perhaps Apple's most noticeable failure, with many users wisely sticking with the trusty old Apple II

>Web resources



www.sunrem.com
Sun Remarketing in Utah, an Apple specialist, continues to stock as-new IIGS systems.

www.apple2.org.za/gswv/a2zine
GS Worldview – a quarterly online journal for Apple IIGS users. The current issue includes a feature on how to fit a IIGS into a PC tower case.

www.a2central.com
A2 Central – the main Apple II online community, supporting all variants of the Apple II range, including the hundreds of cloned machines.

http://store.syndicomm.com
A2 Central Store – sells original Apple II software.

www.juiced.gs
JuicedGS – the website of the last remaining printed Apple IIGS magazine.

www.wap.org/about/a3dvd.html
The Apple III In Ten EZ Lessons. A DVD starring the Apple III.

eMag



>The Next Dimension

It was the company responsible for bringing text adventures into the home, the company which for five years dominated the American software charts with classic games such as Zork and Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, and the company which in the face of falling sales gambled on diversifying its product range and failed spectacularly. Wayne Williams chronicles the dramatic rise and fall of Interactive Fiction legends Infocom

Dave Lebling and Marc Blank loved Colossal Cave, the famous first text adventure game written by Willie Crowther and added to four years later by Don Woods. The two MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) students were seriously addicted to the game. So addicted in fact that in 1977 they decided to write their own version, convinced they could make a better, more natural world.



The Infocom board of directors as of November 1979. From left: Marc Blank, Joel Berez, Al Vezza, JCR Licklinder and Chris Reeve

Lebling and Blank were part of a set called the Dynamic Modelling (DM) group within MIT's Laboratory for Computer Science, although they weren't majoring in computers – Lebling was doing a degree in political science, while Blank was training to become a doctor. With fellow DM student Tim Anderson they began by creating a small four-room world using a parser that Lebling had written in MDL (Muddle), a programming language created in the MIT labs as a successor for LISP.

Buoyed by the success of their first foray into adventure-game writing they roped in a fourth student, Bruce Daniels, and began work on what was eventually to become Zork. (Zork, incidentally, was a nonsense word used in the MIT labs in the 1970s, as was Frob, a word that was later used in Zork II: The Wizard of Frobozz). Although they made quick progress on designing the world and its famous story, it was to be another two years – and after plenty of feedback from fellow students who could log in and play the game six at a time via the university's PDP-10 mainframe – before the game was finally finished. There was no commercial aim behind the creation of Zork; it was just a bit of fun.



Posing for a publicity shot. From left to right, Marc Blank, Joel Berez and Al Vezza

Infocom is born

Al Vezza, professor at MIT, Assistant Director of LCS and leader of the DM group, had for a while been interested in putting together a company to make money from computer programming. Anderson, Lebling and Blank were all keen to continue to work with one another, so it seemed natural for them to join forces. Another professor, JCR Licklider (known as Lick), who had raised funding for the LCS projects, was also interested in being part of the new venture.

Infocom, a name chosen purely because of its inoffensiveness to everyone, was officially founded on 22nd June 1979 by 10 LCS members in total, all of whom committed money – ranging from $400 up to $2,000 – to buy their shares and get the company off the ground. The founding members were: Tim Anderson, Joel Berez, Marc Blank, Mike Broos, Scott Cutler, Stu Galley, Dave Lebling, JCR Licklider, Chris Reeve and Al Vezza. The original board of directors consisted of Lebling, Vezza, Broos, Berez and Galley, although in November both Lebling and Galley resigned from the board and were replaced by Blank and Licklider. Shortly after Broos, who was president, also stepped down and Berez took over. No one worked full-time for the company at this point; it was a part-time project with everyone keeping their day job or completing their studies. The company office was a PO Box.

The idea behind Infocom was to produce computer software. What kind of computer software no one knew. Ideas such as databases, office programs and medical software were all bandied about. Eventually Anderson and Lebling suggested the company retail Zork as it was already written and tested. That made a lot of sense to the rest of the board and so it was agreed that Zork would become Infocom's first official release.

The initial problem the fledgling company faced was how to get its massive 1Mb mainframe game to fit on to the 32Kb home machines. Thankfully Berez and Blank had independently come up with the first part of the answer – a multiformat emulator known as the Z-Machine Interpretive Program, or ZIP for short. ZIP would be different for each machine it ran on but its aim would be the same – to run a virtual processor called Z-Machine. And Z-Machine's role was equally straightforward. As well as compressing text (using 5.5 bits per character instead of the usual 8) it would run the Zork Implementation Language, or ZIL, an updated version of Lebling's original Zork parser that the game would be written in. This meant each computer platform would simply need a one-off ZIP writing for it; the games wouldn't need recoding from scratch. This was something that would come in very handy when the company later began producing a lot of games.

Of course even all this foresight and inventiveness didn't entirely solve the problem of space – the other answer did that. To get a 1Mb game on to a 32Kb platform, huge chunks would have to be chopped out of it. Zork promptly became a game in three parts.

Look who's Zorking

Personal Software (later known as VisiCorp), publisher of the Visicalc spreadsheet, agreed to distribute Zork I for Infocom. In November 1980 the first version of the game, for the PDP-11, hit the shelves. It was followed just one month later by the first home version, for the TRS-80. Bruce Daniels, now working for Apple, wrote a ZIP for the Apple II and that became the third format to be released.

Although the game was moderately successful, selling 1,500 copies for the TRS-80 and 6,000 copies for the Apple II, Infocom wasn't too happy with Personal Software's commitment or how the game had been marketed. The original box art, with a moustachioed warrior



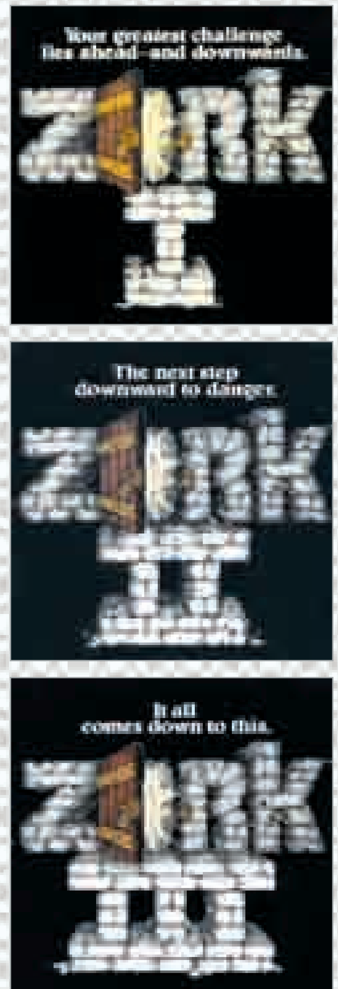


Personal Software's artwork for Zork I suggested the game was a hack-and-slash arcade adventure. But as the screenshot shows, the actual game was rather more reserved

hacking and slashing away, misrepresented the nature of Zork which was all about clever thinking and puzzle solving. Infocom, which had always intended to just be a software developer not a game publisher, decided it could market its own products better and bought back the remaining $32,000's worth of stock. It then repackaged the disks to reflect the true nature of the game and in October 1981 started selling it itself. A month later Zork I was joined on the shelves by the inevitable Zork II, and Marketing Manager Mort Rosenthal joined the company, which now had its first office in Boston, Massachusetts. Berez and Blank also became its first full-time employees.

The two Zork games did very well, and with $160,000 in sales by the end of 1981, Infocom was on the up. Two new games followed: Blank, who loved detective novels, wrote Deadline, then came the third Zork adventure. Steve Meretzky, who would later go on to create many of Infocom's most famous games, joined in November 1981 as a tester on Deadline after the existing one, Meretzky's room-mate Michael Dornbrook, went off temporarily to the University of Chicago's business administration programme. Dornbrook stayed involved in Infocom however. Noticing the number of letters the company received from players begging for help, he had previously set up the Zork User Group, a $2 per-hint service and a newsletter known as the New Zork Times, and with his father's help continued to run it out of a Milwaukee PO Box.

Dornbrook's most famous innovation was the idea of InvisiClues – solutions to the games' trickiest puzzles written in invisible ink which could be revealed using a special pen. This was an idea that was suggested to Mike at a party by a friend after he bemoaned the problem of sending the same hints and solutions out time after time. Two manufacturers in the US were capable of producing the



The Zork trilogy – enter a door to the next dimension

books and pens, and luckily one of them was based nearby.

InvisiClues were sold through bookshops and were a massive success, going on to make up most of the top 10 in the computer book charts – until (following complaints from other publishers) the chart compilers lumped them together as one publication. At this point InvisiClues simply maintained a stranglehold on the number one position. Each game came with a

>The Implementor's Creed

Infocom's game designers were affectionately known as 'implementors', or Imps for short. Stu Galley, one of the company's founding members, circulated an internal memo which outlined the design challenges a successful implementor needed to fulfil. It was entitled The Implementor's Creed, and read as follows:

I create fictional worlds. I create experiences.

I am exploring a new medium for telling stories.

My readers should become immersed in the story and forget where they are. They should forget about the keyboard and the screen, forget everything but the experience. My goal is to make the computer invisible.

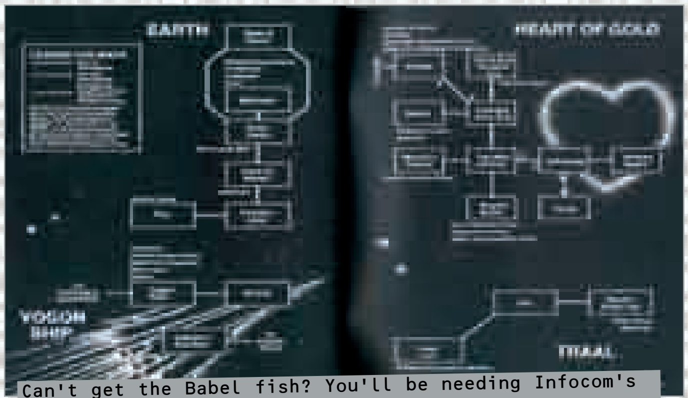
I want as many people as possible to share these experiences. I want a broad range of fictional worlds, and a broad range of 'reading levels'. I can categorize our past works and discover where the range needs filling in. I should also seek to expand the categories to reach every popular taste.

In each of my works, I share a vision with the reader. Only I know exactly what the vision is, so only I can make the final decisions about content and style. But I must seriously consider comments and suggestions from any source, in the hope that they will make the sharing better.

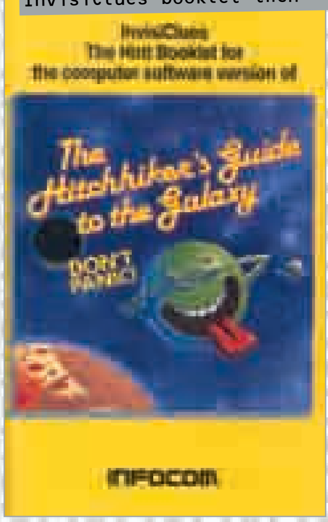
I know what an artist means by saying, "I hope I can finish this work before I ruin it." Each work-in-progress reaches a point of diminishing returns, where any change is as likely to make it worse as to make it better. My goal is to nurture each work to that point. And to make my best estimate of when it will reach that point.

I can't create quality work by myself. I rely on other implementors to help me both with technical wizardry and with overcoming the limitations of the medium. I rely on testers to tell me both how to communicate my vision better and where the rough edges of the work need polishing. I rely on marketers and salespeople to help me share my vision with more readers. I rely on others to handle administrative details so I can concentrate on the vision.

None of my goals is easy. But all are worth hard work. Let no one doubt my dedication to my art.



Can't get the Babel fish? You'll be needing Infocom's InvisiClues booklet then



coupon that allowed the player to buy an InvisiClue booklet and a complete map for $4.95 (at cost). If you didn't have the coupon, perhaps because you'd pirated the software for example, it would cost you $8.95. By 1983, when the Zork User Group was finally absorbed into Infocom, it had over 20,000 members.

A fateful decision

On New Year's Day 1982 the company moved to another office in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Encouraged as the board was by the huge success of its games, it was also jealous of the real money being made by business software developers. Infocom's adventures sold for under $50 dollars each, while business programs went for around 10 times that amount. In particular Infocom was envious of Lotus Development which had been created by some friends from MIT (and Mitch Kapor, the man who had distributed Zork I for Infocom at Personal Software). Many people within Infocom felt the company should be looking to diversify, and so in October 1982 a new business division was created.

This decision wasn't all that strange, given that Infocom's original *raison d'etre* had been to produce general software. Some of the older members of the company, Vezza in particular, were a little uncomfortable with running a firm that only made games; they wanted to do something slightly more serious. They also felt that Infocom's current success was a bubble that wouldn't last forever, and that they needed to branch out in order to continue to grow. It was a commercial decision that made a lot of sense.

Brian Berkowitz and Richard Ilson, who had worked together



Extra! **The New Zork Times** Extra!

More Games, Systems, says Infocom

First Computer Mystery Announced

DEADLINE

InvisiClues

Discount Policy Changed

Special Limited Offer

Issue one of the New Zork Times, the newsletter of the Zork User Group



Infocom's early ads poked fun at the simple graphics available on home computers

in an LCS group called Project MAC on the same floor as the DM group at MIT, were thinking of building a relational database and took the idea to Infocom because they knew the people there. This coincided with Infocom's wish to do something different, and so it looked like fate. The first product from this new venture was swiftly announced – a relational database called Cornerstone. To help Infocom's transition to a producer of serious software, Berez became Chief Operating Officer and Vezza took over as Chief Executive Officer.

In the meantime, game after game followed. All names that adventure fans will be more than familiar with: Suspended, The Witness, Planetfall (Steve Meretzky's first game), Infidel, and Enchanter (developed with the working title Zork IV). Every game was a massive hit, selling upwards of 100,000 copies each. Adverts at the time proclaimed "Infocom – The Next Dimension", and the games clogged up the sales charts. By the end of 1983 all of the company's games were in the top 40 Softsel chart, and the three-year-old Zork I was still at the very top ahead of the likes of Lode Runner, Zaxxon, Frogger, Ultima III and Microsoft Flight Simulator. By the end of 1983 Infocom's annual sales totalled more than $6 million.

1984 saw Infocom's most famous success. Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy creator Douglas Adams was a big fan of the company's work, having been introduced to its adventures with Suspended. He was keen to have his books turned into a game and knew Infocom was the company to do it. Meretzky was assigned the job of working with Adams because of his experience in the sci-fi genre (Planetfall having garnered plenty of best game awards in 83/84) and the two got together for numerous discussions on the game, both face-to-face and electronically.

Hitchhiker's was produced with the two authors working remotely – Steve in Massachusetts, Douglas in London – on two DEC System 20s (the computer all Infocom's adventures were written on at the time) hooked up over the Dialcom network. The game came out in 1984 and was the company's biggest success since Zork. A sequel was discussed, planned and even tentatively started a few years later, but the sales from Bureaucracy, Adams' only other Infocom game, were poorer than hoped so the idea was shelved.

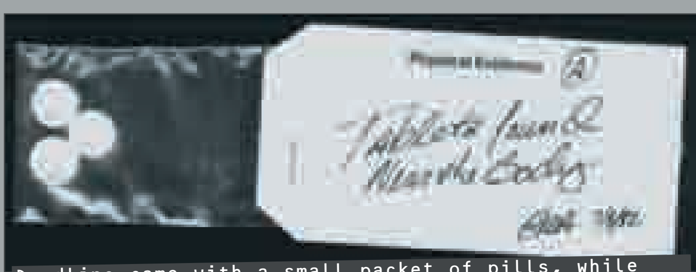
>What's in the box?

One thing that always stood out about Infocom games was their packaging, or rather the extras that came with every game. The first game to include these elements was Deadline. A lack of space meant there wasn't room to feature all the items in the game, so Marc Blank asked Infocom's new advertising agency Giardini/Russel to make them up as physical objects and include them in box as additional extras. Buyers of the game were surprised to not only receive the disks and manual in the box but also photos, interrogation reports, lab analysis, and some pills "found near to the body". It was inspired and quickly became a signature of the Infocom games, as well as helping to thwart piracy.



Over the years that followed the extras became more and more outlandish. Among the items included in the Hitchhiker's game was a pair of Joo Janta 200 Super Chromatic Peril-Sensitive Sunglasses, a microscopic space fleet, a 'Don't Panic' badge, and some bellybutton fluff. There was a glow-in-the-dark stone inside the Wishbringer box, a matchbook with The Witness, a scratch-and-sniff card with Leather Goddesses of Phobos, a Flathead Calendar 883 with Zork Zero, and postcards with Planetfall. Everyone has their own favourites.

By the time Infocom brought the packaging creation in-house in 1984 the company was spending around $60,000 per game on it.



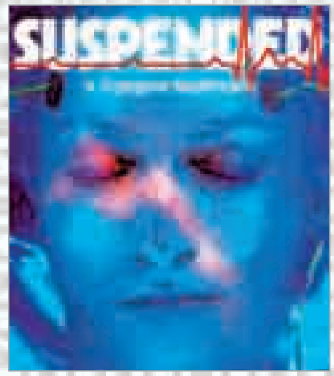
Deadline came with a small packet of pills, while Hitchhiker's came with several bizarre items including bellybutton fluff!

Running into trouble

By the end of 1984, when the firm moved to new and very expensive premises at 125 Cambridge Park Drive, Infocom's annual sales were up to $10 million. Development on the increasingly costly Cornerstone was continuing and by now the increase in programmers, marketing and admin staff had brought Infocom's number of employees up to 100.

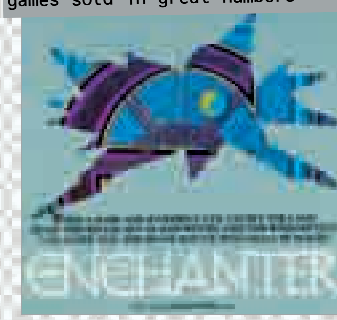
Infocom sought outside Venture Capital funding, but its mix of games and planned business software found few takers. Gulf and Western, owners of Simon and Schuster, offered $20 million for the entire games side of the company, but the offer was rejected. In the end Infocom only managed to secure $500,000, but remained confident that its database could be funded by the future revenue from its games sales.

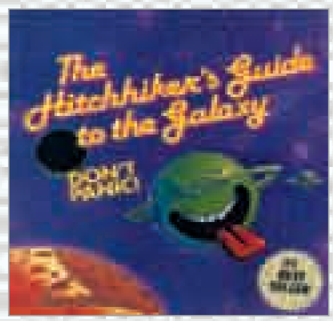
After a long time in development the $495 program finally debuted in 1985 to rave reviews. Cornerstone was ahead of its time with plenty of well-thought-out and innovative features. It had friendly menus, users could add descriptions to files and fields and it would only allow you to enter the correct information (only company names in the company field for example). It was able to autocorrect spelling errors, multivalue and variable length fields were supported, and it was compatible with all the other databases of the day, including Lotus 123, dBase II, and Symphony. In keeping with Infocom's more famous products it also supported parsing and could recognise friendly date statements





Following the success of the Zork trilogy, many of Infocom's later games sold in great numbers





>Play online

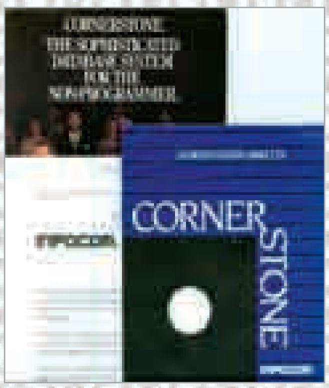
http://jump.to/infocom
Martin Pot's site offers a good selection of games playable via a Java applet

https://www.thcnet.net/error
THCNET gives you a playable version of Zork instead of an error message

www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hitchhikers/game.shtml
You can play the 20th anniversary edition of Hitchhiker's at the BBC's Radio 4 website

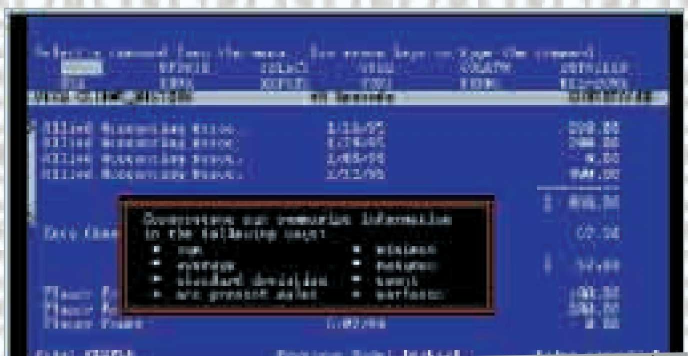
such as 'Next Monday'. It also fitted comfortably onto a single floppy disk.

Unfortunately, for all its pluses, Cornerstone also had problems. Unlike dBase II, it wasn't programmable – you had to use the built-in functions.



Also, by 1985 the PC was becoming the dominant computer platform. Cornerstone's use of a virtual machine to make it platform independent (like the adventure games) meant it ran slowly, especially when handling larger databases.

The software went on to sell well, clocking up 10,000 sales in its first year. Unfortunately, the cost of producing it – $2.5 million – coupled with the fact that it brought in $1.8 million in sales, rather than the projected $4.7 gross profit, made it an expensive failure. This alone probably wouldn't have killed off Infocom, but the company's games were also not doing as well as previously. The text adventure market had begun to die. Graphical adventures, on the next generation of computers like the Amiga and Atari, were rapidly becoming the way forward. Infocom's 1985 annual sales totalled $10 million, the same as the year before, but way below its projected revenue of $12 million plus.



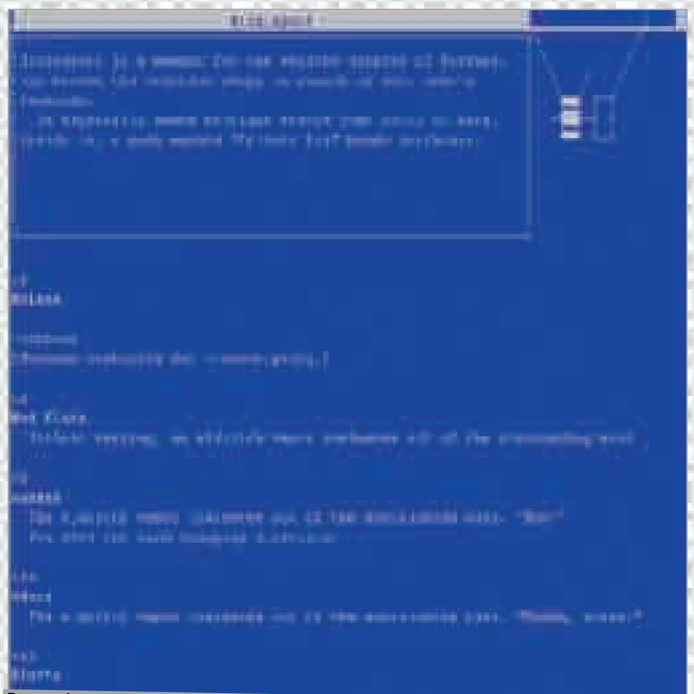
A demo version of Cornerstone was produced to show people how easy it was to use



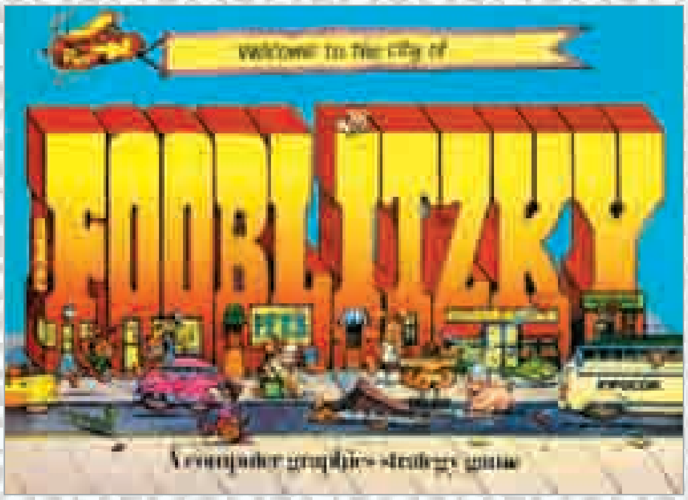
Redundancies were unavoidable. However, the losses were so great the business division was forced to close down entirely. In an attempt to resurrect Cornerstone and at least get back some of the outlay, the software's price was dropped to $99.95, with little success. It was a serious blow to Infocom and Al Vezza who had been convinced the company could "out-Lotus, Lotus".

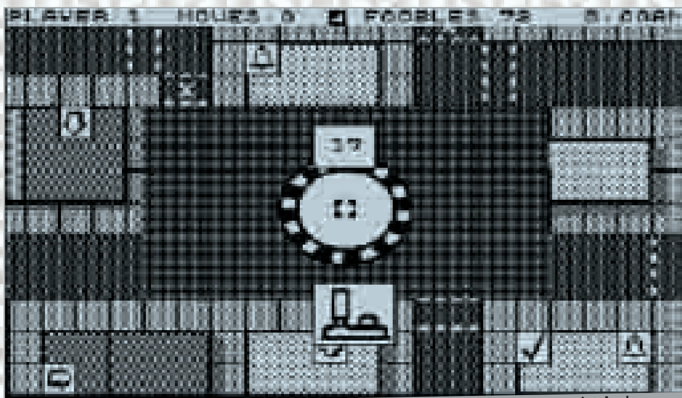
Activision

On 13th June 1986, Infocom, by now down to 40 employees (many of whom had taken pay cuts to keep the company afloat), was purchased by Activision for $7.5 million. At first many believed this to be a good thing. It meant the company could continue at least.



Beyond Zork broke with tradition, offering graphics. Sort of. You got a little map at least



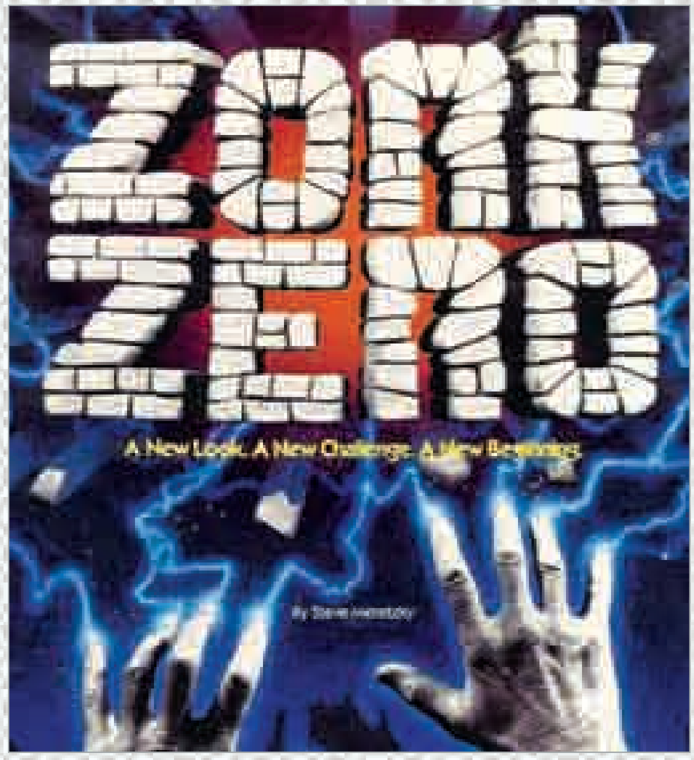


Fooblitzky was something different for Infocom, a multiplayer board game in which you played as a dog

Unfortunately for Infocom, six months after the takeover Activision's CEO Jim Levy was replaced by Bruce Davis. Davis had been against the takeover from the start and set out to make life as difficult, and costly, for the new acquisition as possible. Infocom's games now had a much shorter shelf life and the company was expected to produce eight of them a year, rather than the usual four or five, but with no extra staff. Sales fell to around 10,000 copies per game.

In 1986 Infocom bowed down to public pressure and introduced graphics into its games for the first time. Fooblitzky, a multiplayer board game in which four players (as dogs) competed against one another in a race to collect the correct four objects, was the first of these. It had graphics, but they were two-colour and poorly drawn. The game unsurprisingly flopped.

In 1987 the company released Brian Moriarty's Beyond Zork, its first game with a graphical user interface (of sorts), including a map, a separate window for the inventory items and various RPG-style additions. A year later Steve Meretzky's Zork Zero came out packed with full-colour VGA delights, including graphical games and puzzles. Unfortunately, these concessions to changing public tastes weren't enough to save the company, and in May 1989 Activision forced Infocom to lay off 15 of its remaining 26 staff and move to the company's headquarters in Silicon Valley. With just five of the remaining Infocom staff members prepared to make the move, the truth was undeniable. Infocom, as we knew and loved it, was dead.





Playing the Tower of Bozbar in Zork Zero, an Infocom adventure with full-blown graphics

>Adventure timeline

November 1980	Zork I (Dave Lebling/Marc Blank)
November 1981	Zork II (Dave Lebling/Marc Blank)
April 1982	Deadline (Marc Blank)
September 1982	Zork III (Dave Lebling/Marc Blank) and Starcross (Dave Lebling)
March 1983	Suspended (Mike Berlyn)
June 1983	The Witness (Stu Galley)
August 1983	Planetfall (Steve Meretzky)
September 1983	Enchanter (Dave Lebling/Marc Blank)
November 1983	Infidel (Mike Berlyn)
March 1984	Sorcerer (Steve Meretzky)
June 1984	Seastalker (Stu Galley/Jim Lawrence)
September 1984	Cutthroats (Mike Berlyn/Jerry Wolper)
October 1984	Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Steve Meretzky/Douglas Adams)
November 1984	Suspect (Dave Lebling)
June 1985	Wishbringer (Brian Moriarty)
September 1985	A Mind Forever Voyaging (Steve Meretzky)
October 1985	Spellbreaker (Dave Lebling)
February 1986	Ballyhoo (Jeff O'Neill)
June 1986	Trinity (Brian Moriarty)
September 1986	Leather Goddesses of Phobos (Steve Meretzky)
October 1986	Moonmist (Stu Galley/Jim Lawrence)
November 1986	Enchanter Trilogy
January 1987	Zork Trilogy and Hollywood Hijinx (Dave Anderson/Liz Cyr-Jones)
March 1987	Bureaucracy (Douglas Adams and "The Staff of Infocom")
June 1987	Stationfall (Steve Meretzky) and The Lurking Horror (Dave Lebling)
September 1987	Nord and Bert Couldn't Make Head or Tail of It (Jeff O'Neill) and Plundered Hearts (Amy Briggs)
October 1987	Beyond Zork (Brian Moriarty)
November 1987	Border Zone (Marc Blank)
December 1987	Solid Gold: Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy and Zork I
January 1988	Sherlock – Riddle of the Crown Jewels (Bob Bates)
March 1988	Lane Mastodon vs. the Blubbermen (Steve Meretzky/Tom Snyder Productions) and Gamma Force (Amy Briggs/Tom Snyder Productions)
April 1988	ZorkQuest I (Elisabeth Langosy/ Tom Snyder Productions)
July 1988	Solid Gold: Leather Goddesses of Phobos and Planetfall
August 1988	ZorkQuest II (Elisabeth Langosy/ Tom Snyder Productions)
September 1988	Solid Gold: Wishbringer and Quarterstaff (Scott Schmitz and Ken Updike)
October 1988	Zork Zero (Steve Meretzky)
November 1988	BattleTech (Westwood Associates)
March 1989	Shogun (Dave Lebling based on the James Clavell book) and Journey (Marc Blank)
June 1989	Arthur (Bob Bates)

>Steve Meretzky interview



Infocom's most famous Imp, now principal game designer at online-gaming portal WorldWinner.com, talked to us about his memories of the great company and what it was like working with Douglas Adams.

Retro Gamer: How did you get involved with Infocom?

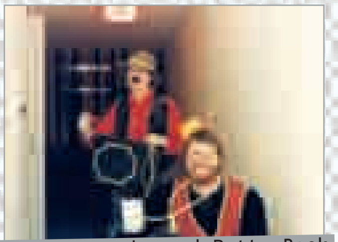
Steve Meretzky: I already knew several of the founders, Marc Blank and Joel Berez. We were all involved with the film program at MIT. I was also rooming with Mike Dornbrook, who was Infocom's first (and, at the time, only) game tester. When he left town to attend business school in Chicago, Marc asked me if I'd like to replace him as Infocom's playtester. I tested Deadline, Zork III, and Starcross, and then Marc offered me the chance to become a game writer ('implementor', in Infocom parlance).

RG: What is your favourite memory of working at Infocom?

SM: There are just so many – it was such a young, fun group of people and we were more like a big extended family than a company. A lot of my favourite memories revolve around parties. We had beer every Friday at 5pm, but often these would be expanded to fully fledged parties or some sort of unique festivity. For instance, the time we put on a mock trial of Hollywood Dave for killing all the goldfish in the fish pond (in an attempt to clean the pond). Or the time we had a graduation ceremony for our CEO, Al Vezza, after he attended a weeklong 'CEO School'. Or the Halloween party where we put on an 'interactive play', with audience members shouting parser-like instructions to the cast.

Another fun thing we often did at these Friday parties was to hold Infocom versions of TV game shows, such as the 20,000 Zorkmid Pyramid. And for a period of several months, the Friday parties included hermit crab races, complete with pari-mutuel betting [where the gambler bets against other gamblers, not the house].

There were also incredible parties that the company would throw for the press at trade shows, such as the Bring Your Own Brain party at the Field›››



Steve Meretzky and Betty Rock at Infocom's Halloween party

Museum in Chicago, where we sent invitees on a scavenger hunt through the museum for prizes. Or another party at the Field Museum, where we hired the Second City cast to create skits promoting Stationfall and The Lurking Horror. Or the party at Elvis Presley's former mansion in Las Vegas, with the Murder-To-Go mystery troupe staging a killing to promote our latest game, Suspect.

Another great memory is the pre-Christmas season when our orders were running far ahead of the production facility's ability to assemble the game boxes. So employees signed up for Saturday and Sunday shifts to keep the assembly lines running, operating labelling machines, shrinkwrapping machines, etc. It was a great example of the whole company pulling together but also having a fun time.

But certainly the best memory I have is meeting the lovely Betty Rock, who worked in the sales department at Infocom and who will join me in celebrating our 19th anniversary in a few days!

RG: Congratulations! Tell us about Planetfall. What was it like designing your first game?

SM: Slow at first, as I had to learn a new programming language (ZIL). Also, at the beginning, I was still spending about half my time testing. So even though I started writing the game in September of 1982, it didn't really start coming together until perhaps early spring of '83. But I quickly learned that writing games was even more fun than testing them.

RG: Were you surprised by people's emotional response to Floyd's death?

SM: I wasn't surprised that people had an emotional response; I wrote that scene to create one. But I was certainly surprised by the magnitude of the response. And by the fact that people are still asking about it, 20 years later!

RG: What was the game design process like in general?

SM: It varied a lot from game to game. If a game was a sequel – such as my second game, Sorcerer – it was necessary to follow the content and style of the previous game or games. In that case, where Sorcerer was the fifth game in the sequence, after the Zork Trilogy and Enchanter, there was a huge amount of world background and history to be consistent with, so I spent a long time combing through the code for those four games, compiling a detailed database of Zork lore. (I continued to maintain that database through subsequent games, and ended up including it within a game – Zork Zero in 1988 – as referenced through a copy of the Encyclopedia Frobozzica.)

If a game was an adaptation of material from another medium, as in the case of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, that also brought a series of constraints on the design process.

Sometimes one element of the design – the storyline, the geography, the puzzles, the humour, the package elements – would be dominant and would be developed first, with the other elements then formed around that. But other times they would all be fairly equal and would evolve in parallel.

RG: How did you come to work with Douglas Adams?

SM: Douglas was an Infocom player and fan, and so when he, his agent and his publisher began discussing the subject of a computer-game adaptation of Hitchhiker's Guide, he was adamant that it be with Infocom. Marc Blank suggested that I collaborate on the game with Douglas, partly due to fortunate timing (I had just completed Sorcerer), partly because many people had found Planetfall to be reminiscent of the humour of Hitchhiker's Guide, and partly because I was the only implementor who was as tall as Douglas.

RG: What was he like?

SM: The best way to describe Douglas is that he was the ideal dinner companion. He could speak intelligently and with wit about almost any topic under the sun. Unfortunately, as a collaborator, he suffered from the fact that he was the world's worst procrastinator! I had to practically camp out on his doorstep in England to get him to finish his stuff for the game. Otherwise, working with him was great. He had such a different perspective on things, and came up with puzzles and scenes that I'd never have thought of in a million years on my own – having the game lie to you, or using a parser failure as the words which fell through a wormhole in the universe and started an interstellar war, or having an object like "no tea".

RG: How did the infamous Babel fish puzzle originate?

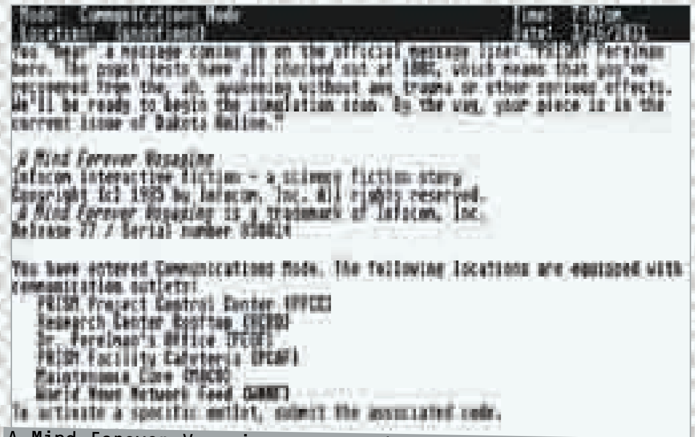
SM: The basic idea was by Douglas, and I added some refinements (like the Upper-Half-Of-The-Room Cleaning Robot). More interesting is how close the puzzle came to being removed



Master Imp Steve Meretzky at a trade show complete with Don't Panic badge and wife-to-be



The 20,000 Zorkmid Pyramid game – just another Friday night party at Infocom



A Mind Forever Voyaging won awards and proved that it was possible to make socially aware adult games

from the game; most of Infocom's testing group thought it was too hard. I was going into a meeting with them just as Douglas was leaving for the airport at the end of his final trip to Infocom, and I asked him, "What should I tell them about the Babel fish puzzle?" He said, "What should you tell them? Tell them to fuck off!" So the puzzle stayed... and its very hardness became a cult thing. Infocom even sold T-shirts that said "I got the Babel fish!"



The advert for Steve's Leather Goddesses of Phobos was suitably tongue-in-cheek

RG: What are your memories of working on the Hitchhiker's game?

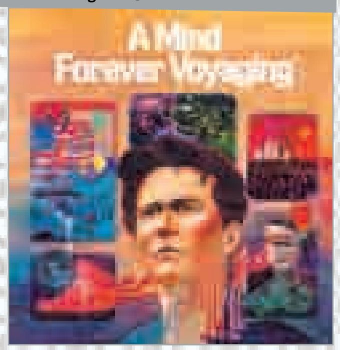
SM: Around May of 1984, with the game just a few weeks away from its deadline for the start of alpha testing, and about half the game still undesigned, I went over to England. Douglas was not only procrastinating on the game, he was also procrastinating on the fourth Hitchhiker's book, So Long and Thanks For All the Fish. His agent had sent him to a country inn in western England, far from the distractions of London life. That's where I went, with instructions to camp out on his doorstep until the game design was done. We spent four days at this really pleasant inn, a former baronial mansion, sipping expensive wines and designing the game. How can life get any better than that?

RG: What is your favourite Infocom game?

SM: My favourite Infocom game has always been Dave Lebling's Starcross, but I also love Jeff O'Neill's Nord and Bert Couldn't Make Head or Tail of It for being so original and different. Of my own games, my favourite would be A Mind Forever Voyaging, because it was my largest, most serious, and most socially relevant work, and because I feel it showed that computer games could be more than an adolescent pastime, but could instead be used to explore Big Issues. Except perhaps for Floyd's death, it's the game of mine that seems to have touched people most deeply.

RG: Were there any games that never got finished? (You were working on a Titanic game that got cancelled we believe?)

SM: Not many during Infocom days, but many since then. I never really started the Titanic game at Infocom, although it probably would have been my next game after Zork Zero if Activision hadn't shut Infocom down at that point. I tried selling the Titanic idea numerous times during post-Infocom days, in particular when I had my own development studio (Boffo Games), but was told over and over that "no one's interested in the Titanic". So it was with a bit



of irony that I watched Cameron's movie become the highest grossing film in history.

RG: Have you ever had the inclination to write another text adventure? (Such as Leather Goddesses 3 or Planetfall 2: The Search for Floyd?)

SM: Actually, I wrote a design for a new Planetfall game for Activision back in 1993 and 1994. It asked for rewrite after rewrite, and finally just killed the game. Every couple of years, I hear a rumour that they're going to revive it. But I would like to write a text adventure at some point when I have some time... Perhaps after the kids go to college... RG*

eMag

>Desert Island Disks

This month's castaway is Mystikal, member of Welsh hip-hop wreckin' crew Goldie Lookin Chain. Paul Drury met up with him backstage at their recent Nottingham Rock City gig...



>WHO?

Mystikal, aka The Druid, part of the GLC collective

I'm used to interviewing middle-aged programmers, not pop stars backstage. I feel I should raise my game and decide to go straight in with the question that really matters… So, which is better, the Spectrum or the C64?

"Ah, a long-debated issue in the playgrounds and classrooms. Mmm…" Mystikal strokes his goatee beard and starts weighing up the evidence. "The Speccy – rubber keys, four colours, garish, particularly noticeable in the early beat-em- and shoot-em-ups. The Commodore 64 – nice sound, especially when it was loading. I'm going to go for the ZX, purely because it was small enough for you to hack into the Pentagon and the cool thing was the original model had a command in that changed the power output and you could melt it."

So that's settled that argument then. If you're wondering why this month's castaway is a Welsh rapper and not an eighties' coding legend, then you've obviously not heard Goldie Lookin Chain's recent single 'Half Man, Half Machine', a tender ode to the joy of interfacing with your Spectrum. "Binatone, Spectrum, Pac-Man, Commodore/ ZX81, Donkey Kong, fucking high score" it opens, before building up to the immortal line "I'm not like other people you might see or you might know/ I made love to a BBC Micro". We're all into retro, but that's taking it to a new level.

If you need any more justification for the band's inclusion in Retro Gamer, then head over to their website (**www.youknowsit.co.uk**), where you get to choose either 'low-tec' or 'hi-tec' versions of the site, with the former being "suitable for old-skool Chainheads working on BBC Micros, C64s or ZX Spectrums". Select the hi-tec version though, and you're greeted by a C64 loading screen, with the scrolling message "Cracked by Mystikal". The whole front end of the site is presented as an old arcade cabinet, complete with fag burns and scrawled obscenities. You have to play Pong to enter the mobile-phone section and the highlight has to be the 'Roll a Remedy' game, which involves hitting Z and X repeatedly (à la Track and Field) to increase your skinning-up speed.

"There's lots more retro content planned for the site, which we're keeping under wraps – Goldie Lookin Chain-based concepts translated through the medium of retro games in our quest for Web supremacy."

You knows it

As the site says: "1983. You knows it." A vintage year for gaming and a crucial one for GLC: "1983 was a fucking great year. It was the year that Eggsy started experimenting with Studio Recorder 60. The start of The Masterplan. A lot of the ideas we use nowadays were born of that golden era." I wonder what Mystikal remembers of that year. "Climbing trees, wrecking go-karts, being amazed at the concept of barbecues, and as the proud owner of a BBC Micro, playing such classics as Liberator, Killer Gorilla and various arcade rip-offs."

I'm surprised – I would have thought a Dragon 32 would have been more appropriate? "Nah, but I knew there were some Dragon owners who'd gather in hushed corners of the playground, trying to avoid eye contact." Being a BBC user was no easy ride when it came to swapping pirated games at school: "The best shit we got was educational software – all fucking wank. Though there



The 'hi-tec' version of the GLC website features all manner of retro content









You knows it makes sense to use a fish-eye lens

was one good one where you had to shoot polar bears, something about survival and bars of chocolate... no, it was crap too. I'd go to my mate's house and play stuff like Dizzy and OutRun on his Amstrad. That was before I discovered Elite."

Mystikal did harbour dreams of creating games himself, fondly recalling the ring-binder manual that came with his BBC: "It looked the bollocks and I thought I'd crack it and have satellites in space. Two pages in... fucked." He also suffered the all-too-common indignity of spending hours typing in game listings from magazines, only for them never to work, or at best leave you bitterly disappointed: "I remember one that I thought was going to be my own personalised, highly customisable Space Invaders. It wasn't. Three hours and I get one invader walking across the screen."

But then there were always the arcades: "I first played Space Invaders in the local chippy, but not till 1981. It was Wales – we were behind the times. The best place was Barry Island. All the best 10p machines – Double Dragon, RoboCop, 1942... And I think they're still there. They never renovate anything in Wales. Even if someone dies on one of the slides, they just say 'Yeah, all fixed now' and the next victim awaits." One for an Arcade Hunt feature perhaps, before the collectors, or the Health and Safety Executive, beat us to it.

Games have always been a big part of Mystikal's life. He admits to buying C&VG even when he didn't own a computer and eulogises about The Eagle's comic strip 'Computer Warrior', which involved the hero being sucked into popular games of the time and having to battle through them. He particularly recommends the Turrican episode. Mystikal notes, however, that though the band were childhood friends who all loved games, it wasn't a case of getting together for heated gaming sessions:

"None of us were posh enough to own consoles back then. It's weird, because now we do all play games together. We're conquering Athens 2004, getting back into that Track and Field thing." Mystikal starts hammering the table with his index finger, which attracts the attention of the rest of the band. Billy Webb regales us with his current lap times on Super Mario Kart (he's good), Adam Hussain and Mike Balls declare their love of footy games, 2Hats makes me promise to look out for a Tron handheld for him, and even their tour manager starts reminiscing about an old submarine game called Silent Service.

Clearly, the band play together, stay together, and have a PS2 on the tour bus which is in constant use. "We've got heavily into Tiger Woods 2005. It's got fucking disturbing – customising our golfers with tracksuits and headbands so they look like they've just stepped out of TK Maxxx. Vice City is a favourite, too. Blowing a virtual man's head off is very relaxing, though we don't call it Vice City anymore. It's known as Drive Nice 3. You might be fucked in a mission and you've got to keep your car in pristine condition. 'Easy now Eggsy, drive nice.' So when you're about to get comfortable for a bout of game playing, we say 'Get in nice'." And so another specialist term enters the GLC glossary, along with Clart, Valley Commando and Lliswerry Tash.

Goldie Lookin Game

The chances of the new single 'Your Mother's Got a Penis' appearing in the next version of Dancing Stage seems slim, so I ask Mystikal to describe GLC – The Videogame. "It'd probably be set on a tour bus and you'd have to escape our clutches. It would be an amalgamation of genres, starting as a text adventure. You'd type GET OUT OF BED and OPEN EYES and there'd be a whole graphical interface. We'd call it something like 'Escape from Newport'."

Being Welsh, I wonder if he's ever met Jeff Minter, who incidentally has the tagline on his forum posts of 'Reach for the Wavebird. Safe as Fuck', which paraphrases a GLC lyric. "Yeah, the twisted bloke. Never met him but big shout out to Jeff. Sadly enough, I would love to meet Ian Bell and David Braben. I know they've had a massive falling out over Elite and it's descended into legend with lawsuits against each other. You know, it's quite a romantic notion, the whole idea of bedroom programmers. Back in the day, you'd see on cassette inlays stuff like 'If you are a programmer, please send your games in'. I love the whole thing of someone having an idea and making a game. They probably got £25 for it and were ripped off, mind."

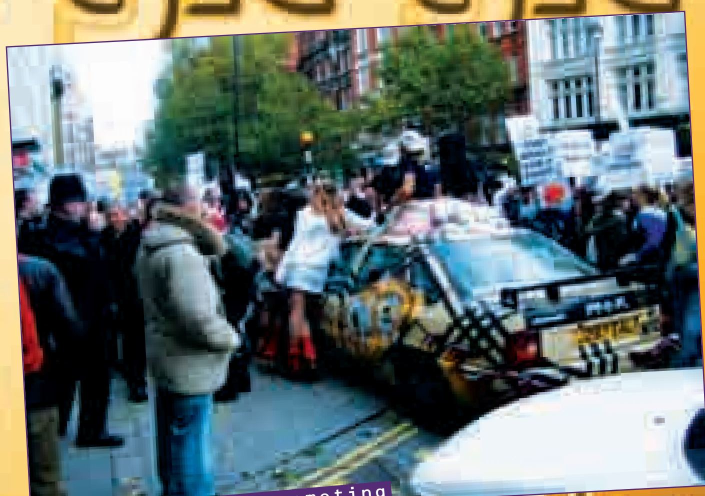
Despite being a dedicated retrogamer, Mystikal has dabbled in Xbox Live and has some interesting theories on the future of gaming: "I don't think anyone's life will be complete until they can envelop themselves in a full sensory experience that shuts them off from their mundane lives and nagging wives and girlfriends. Until that time comes, man will always be looking for the ultimate virtual fix."

And on the subject of fixes, I decide to get some expert advice on how best to combine two of Mystikal's great loves – games and drugs. "When you're caned you want to go for something like Drive Nice 3 or some kind of retro compilation, to get people reminiscing about their childhood. Or maybe one of those early PlayStation demo discs, with Dolphins and structures… all a bit Jean Michel Jarre. The EyeToy with that karate game is good too. When on cheap cider you want something simple, so that if you fuck up if doesn't matter. Crash Bandicoot – bright lights and shit going on – you feel like a six year old. Still works if you're so fucked you don't know whether to piss or shit yourself. Cheap cider does strange things to people, man."

Just Say No, kids. To end on a natural high, I pull out a Retro Gamer Spectrum hooded top and thrust a GBA playing Manic Miner into Mystikal's hands. He expresses his thanks through the medium of swearing and is soon modelling the hoodie and deeply engrossed in Matthew Smith's masterpiece. "I've got to stop before I disappear into a virtual world," he says, and with that, he and the rest of the band head off for some pre-gig preparation, which may or may not involve Athens 2004.

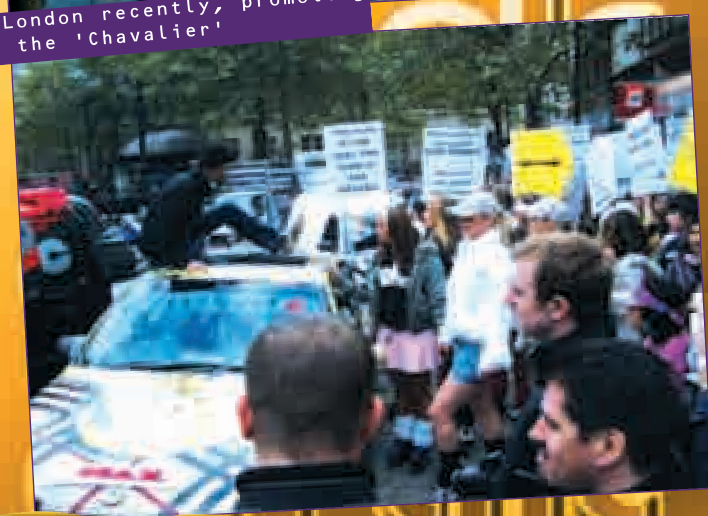
As he leaves, I throw out one last question: which game character would you take with you to your desert island? "Mario – he'd have loads of mushrooms."





The band on the streets of London recently, promoting their new single. Check out the 'Chavalier'



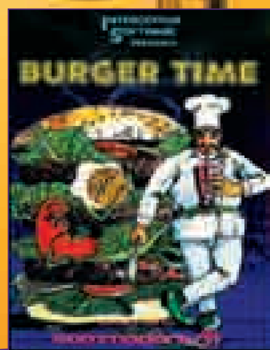


Elite

Acornsoft

To fit an entire universe on one spool of tape was in itself a colossal task. It was more than perfect, beautifully crafted and it was simple. I mean shit and sellotape held it together, yet it's one of the best games ever.





Burger Time

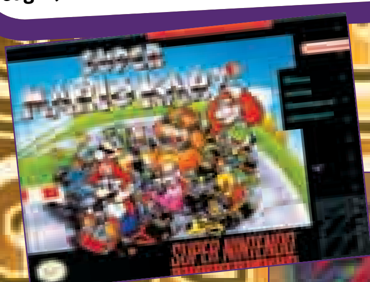
Interceptor Software

A little chef armed with pepper being chased by eggs and sausages. Wicked man. Safe as fuck.

Super Mario Kart

Nintendo

Possibly the best multiplayer game ever, either on the race track or in battle mode. I knew some Cardiff boys who worked on the Nintendo helpline, which gave them carte blanche to scream obscenities down the phone to kids, and they took it to a whole different level – the bouncing technique to push people over the edges, fucking everything. The band still play it a lot.





Legend of Zelda

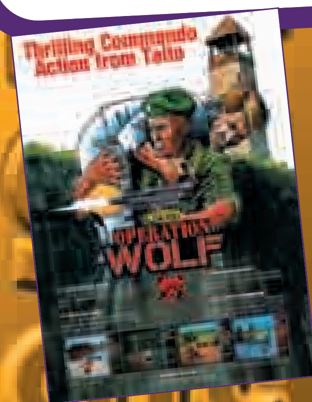
Nintendo

Captured the hearts and minds of a generation. Once released, people just wouldn't go out the house. You'll probably see it again with GTA: San Andreas – all pubs, clubs and restaurants totally devoid of men.

Operation Wolf

Tatio

The only thing worth looking forward to at a motorway service station. The only game at the time with any sort of automatic weapon. Easy doors.





Star Glider

Argonaut

Like Elite, but more exciting at the start. Got well into it before Elite took over.

GTA: Vice City

Rockstar

A game unparalleled in violence, adventure and misadventure. People say 'violent videogames – source of a nation's grief' and I say yeah, but this teaches you the consequences – the police come after you. Though admittedly you can then run the fuckers over.





OutRun

US Gold

Played it on my mate's Amstrad. Came with two cassettes, one with the game on and the other with the soundtrack on. If you got bored on the road, you could drive through the surf. Fucking brilliant.





>Way of the Ninja

In 1987, System 3 released a game that would set the Commodore 64 gaming world alight. The Last Ninja mixed traditional beat-em-up action with puzzle-solving gameplay, and was viewed in fabulous (isometric) 3D. Sequels, ports and remixes followed, and now a new version is in development for the PlayStation 2. With that in mind, Shaun Bebbington lays into this classic series

You'd be forgiven for thinking that System 3 was only interested in releasing games with a martial arts theme. All of its memorable games were based around an oriental theme until the release of Tusker in 1989. Its first popular game was International Karate, released in 1986 and licensed to Epyx for the American market under the name of World Championship Karate. Thereafter came the C64 release of The Last Ninja, which took the beat-em-up concept to a new level and cemented System's position as a premier UK publishing house.



First of the last

The Last Ninja was met with critical acclaim from the popular press and gamers alike. System 3 had created something more than just any old beat-em-up. The isometric 3D environment was interactive, and the gameplay contained a mix of tricky puzzles *and* beat-em-up action. Although you'd be limited to using set paths throughout the game, the levels were well thought out, with each opening up as you solved or performed certain tasks.

The story started with the creation and popularisation of Ninjitsu, which became the most feared and powerful martial art in the land. Not even the mighty Samurai Warriors dare test its power. Yet the evil Shogun of the Ashikaga Clan, Kunitoki, plotted against the order of the Ninja and successfully assassinated them all, but for one. Armakuni, now the last Ninja, escaped with his life and set out to avenge the deaths of his brotherhood.

In your quest to defeat Kunitoki and his clan, you could use a variety of deadly weapons or rely on straightforward hand-to-hand, toe-to-toe combat. Your character could be turned in one of eight directions, shifting in steps of 90 degrees, and able to walk backwards or to the side as required. Rotating the joystick would turn him, and holding the fire button whilst moving in one of the eight directions would perform different actions, such as kick, punch or collect. This control method was awkward and fiddly, especially at first, and it was only after prolonged play that it felt anything close to instinctive.

Getting used to the control method and combat situations meant that it wasn't one of those games that you could pick up and put down quickly. Mastering the game was almost like learning a martial art itself, making it popular with more mature and experienced players. Besides beating up baddies, advancing through the game often involved accurate timing and pixel-perfect movements. Jumping across streams and swamps, for example – a pixel out or a split second too late and you'd suffer death from drowning (we're guessing swimming wasn't on the timetable at Ninja night-school). Despite these frustrating elements, and the severe learning curve in general, the game would drag you back again and again. You were on a quest after all, and you wanted to see it through to the bitter end.

Imagine the disappointment then, after many hours of playing, working out all the head-pecking puzzles and defeating loads of heinous foe, to finally finish the game and be told that "The quest continues…". This was both good and bad: bad because the game (and the player) deserved better than a few closing words and a fade to black; good because there was the salivating prospect of a sequel.

Platform jumping

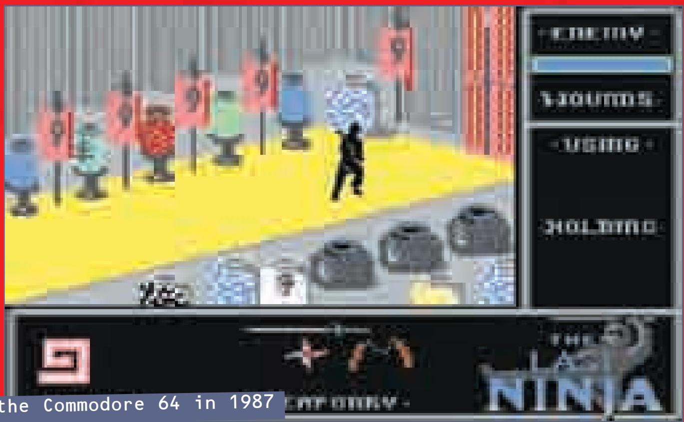
Sales of the C64 release alone are reported to be in excess of 750,000 copies, and that's just within Europe. System 3 had a very lucrative hit on its hands, and the game was inevitably ported to several platforms, from the humble BBC Micro to the 32-bit Acorn Archimedes.

For its time, the most impressive thing about the game was its graphics, with the original C64 version featuring over 1,000 sprites. The game had to be split into a multi-load to accommodate all of the pixelated data. It was amazing then when the Acorn version worked with the BBC Model B and Electron, as these machines had half of the C64's memory. Peter Scott managed this feat by using lower-resolution graphics, while still managing to keep it as close as possible to the original.

Superior Software published the Acorn version, while Activision took care of the similar-looking Apple II version. Other 8-bit ports for the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Atari 800 were planned, but never materialised. The Spectrum version was delayed several times, with a preview in Sinclair User magazine revealing that the developers were having difficulty making the main character move authentically. Crash later revealed that the game was about half finished, but by this time System 3 was readying the sequel for launch, and all efforts were halted in favour of releasing the second game.

Other ports appeared on the 16-bit Apple IIGS and the IBM PC (EGA/CGA and compatibles), but it was the Acorn Archimedes that really stood out from the pack. Programmed by Andrew Catling and released a few years later in 1992, this was easily the best-looking version ever with fantastic graphics throughout.





The Last Ninja debuted on the Commodore 64 in 1987

Ninjas in New York

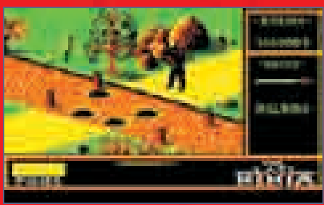
Last Ninja 2 appeared on the Commodore 64 in 1988. Trying to add something new and unique to the sequel, System 3 brought the Ninja action to a busy city environment, using the old-time travel trick to place Armakuni in modern-day New York. Kunitoki had also been thrust into the future, so the battle between them could continue unabated.

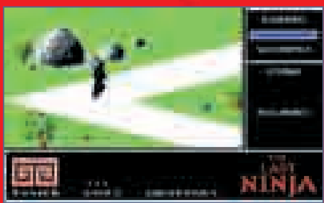
The compulsive gameplay of the first title had not only been recreated, but also improved for this second venture. Although the control method was still a little fiddly, you were now able to kneel to collect objects, making it easier to pick up and use certain items. The pixel-perfect leaps required in the first had gone for the most part, with a somewhat kinder environment. Also added was more beat-em-up action from the outset. When beaten, the thugs and other unsavoury characters would slowly regain their energy, returning to knock seven shades out of you once more. You would need to beat them again to truly finish them off.

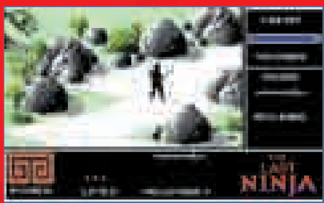
Just as before, a lot of trial and error was needed to progress. Later levels would be more about fighting than puzzles. And just as you couldn't complete The Last Ninja without the key from the very first level, you could not finish the sequel without the computer code from the previous level. And that damn code was easy to miss...

At the time of release, Last Ninja 2 was regarded as an improvement over its predecessor. The game was more action-orientated, yet the puzzles remained an integral part of the play, and the graphics had been buffed up. The new setting also served to introduce more atmosphere, resulting in a first-class action adventure that is generally regarded as the highlight of the series.

As with the first game, the sequel was converted to many different machines, including those that missed out on the original. The Spectrum version unsurprisingly featured monochrome graphics, although it was a shame that the Amstrad version was almost identical, taking no advantage of the CPC's superior colour palette. The same could not be said about the Atari ST and Amiga versions which both featured beautifully vibrant visuals. Special mention must be made of the NES conversion.





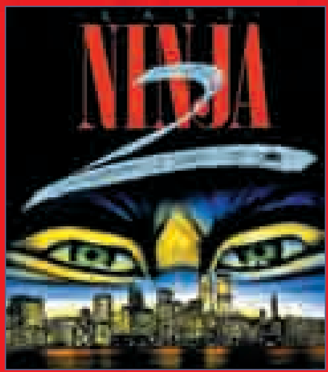




Different versions of the game. From top to bottom: the BBC/Electron version, the PC version, the Apple IIGS version and the Archimedes version



This early advert states that the game will be available for the C64, Spectrum, Atari ST & 800



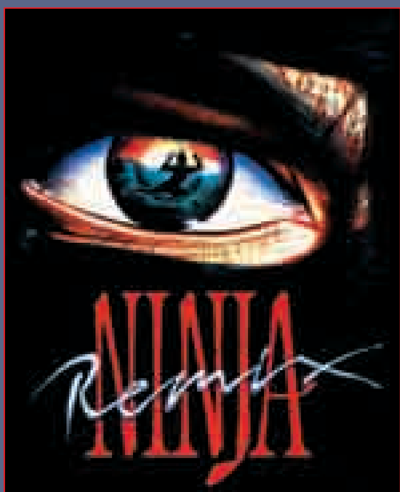






With an improved control system and a distinct setting, Last Ninja 2 is often hailed as the highlight of the series

>In the mix

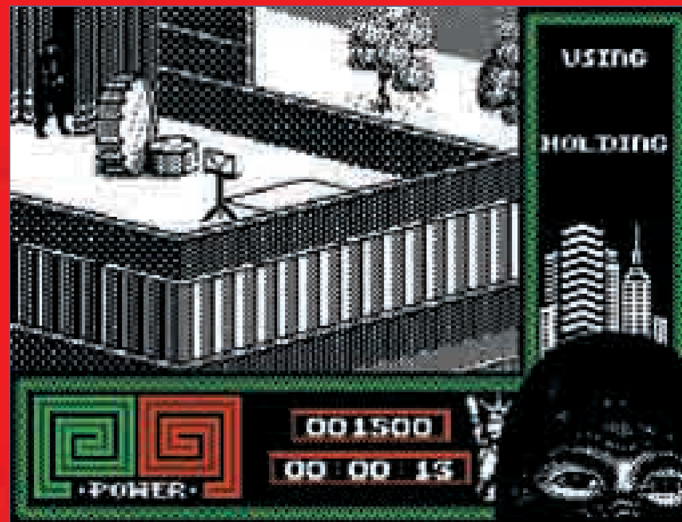


Rather than release Last Ninja 2 as a budget title, System 3 chose to tart the title up and re-release it on 8-bit machines as Last Ninja Remix. The update featured a new introduction sequence, a different static screen surrounding the play area, arguably better music and a few small bug fixes. Essentially though, it was the same game as Last Ninja 2. Ninja Remix appeared on the Commodore 64, Spectrum and Amstrad in 1990. To tie-in with the launch of the C64GS console, a cartridge version of the game was also released for the C64 (the packaging claimed that the cart was "4 Megs", although it was 4 Mega*bits* – 512 Kilobytes – not 4 Mega*bytes*!). Even though the cartridge was compatible with all C64s, it did not sell in great numbers and is now sought-after. Had the C64GS been successful and the cartridge format proved more popular, System 3 would have released Last Ninja 3 on the medium. Instead, it played it safe by releasing the concluding title on tape and disk, and even though the instruction manual includes information for C64GS users, no carts are known to exist.

Ninja Remix was also released on the Atari ST and Amiga, but for the 16-bit machines it was an update of The Last Ninja. This made more sense, as the original game was never released for either machine first time around, even though a playable version of the ST game has since leaked out (complete with music from International Karate!) Ninja Remix gave System 3 a chance to release the first game on 16-bit machines before unveiling Last Ninja 3.



The highlight of Ninja Remix was its amazing animated introduction sequence

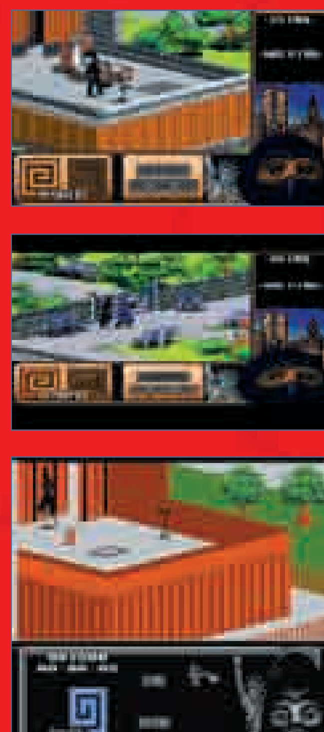


Entitled The Last Ninja (presumably to prevent any confusion), the game marks the series' one and only appearance on a non-Commodore console. Published under licence by Jaleco and developed by Beam Software, the game was easily the best 8-bit conversion, and with super-colourful graphics and a catchy soundtrack, it ranked alongside the C64 original.

The last Last Ninja

Last Ninja 3 saw Armakuni back in ancient times, bidding to end the Shogun's evil reign of terror once and for all. The story was essentially the same, and so it proved was the game. Regardless, Last Ninja 3 was released with some bold claims behind it. From its manual, System 3 introduced its new game with the following paragraph: "Rarely does a company make as dramatic an impact as did System 3 with the award winning games The Last Ninja and the Last Ninja II. This software innovation proved to be a major advance in home computer entertainment achieving critical acclaim from the media and game players around the world."

Very bold indeed, especially as



The sequel appeared on many different machines. From top to bottom: The Amstrad version, the Atari ST version, the Amiga version and the NES version

it had been three years since the release of Last Ninja 2. Time moves on, and by this third instalment Armakuni's adventures were looking a little tired. It was certainly the









The Commodore 64 version of Last Ninja 3 looked almost as good as its 16-bit counterparts

best-looking game to date; the Commodore 64 version was particularly impressive, almost on a par with the Atari ST and Amiga in terms of detail. But the gameplay was starting to show its age, and it was becoming harder to forgive the frankly archaic control system. Many would argue that Last Ninja 3 was actually a step down from its predecessor, suffering from poor level design and a lack of decent puzzles. It was by no means a bad game – it just failed to bring anything new to the ageing series.

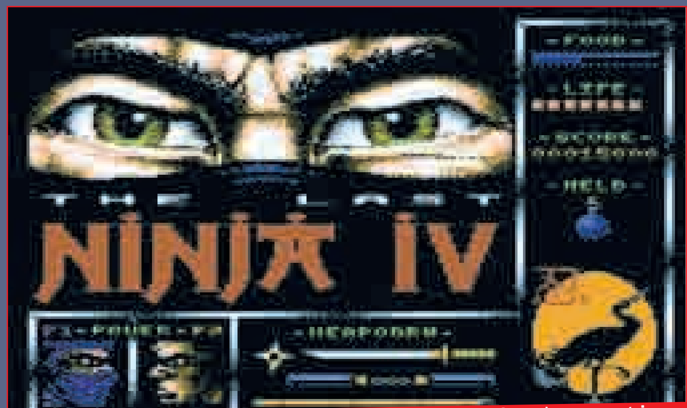
Last Ninja 3 was in development for the Spectrum and Amstrad, but sadly neither of these versions materialised. A port appeared on the Amiga CD32, but despite quicker loading times, it was identical to the disk version.

And from one CD-based console to another, as System 3 look to release a new version of The Last Ninja on the Xbox console. This full-3D update has been in development for over two years now, and at one point was thought to have been cancelled, but System 3 boss Mark Cale has revealed that the game will be fully unveiled at the E3 event next May. In addition, the original Last Ninja trilogy is heading to the PlayStation 2, with updated versions of all three games included on a single disc. It seems that The Last Ninja series will no longer be just a piece of gaming history... RG*

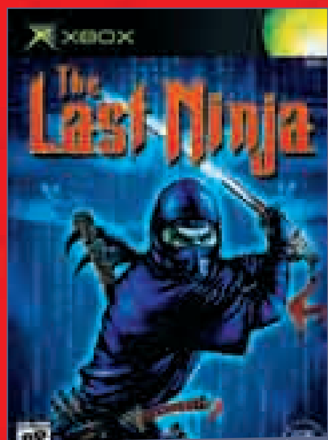
>Last Ninja 4?

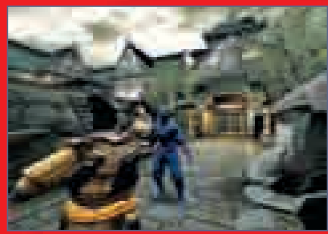
A fourth game was never intended to be commercially released for any of the 8-bit systems, at least not from System 3. However, the prolific C64 coder Jon Wells reworked the game engine so that the main character could walk on the grass, thus potentially making the play more open-ended.

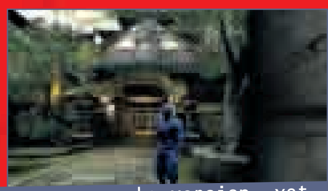
Wells further mocked up a loading screen and playable demo based on Last Ninja 2, presenting it to System 3, saying that he wanted to make a fourth game as a tribute to the original trilogy. After the company refused he said that he would be willing to work for free as long as he could use the name and relevant intellectual properties. System 3 still refused permission, seemingly not wanting to associate itself with the shrinking 8-bit market, and Wells had to abandon the project. Still, we can gaze at the loading screen and wonder what might have been...



Jon Wells wanted to pay tribute to the series by creating a fourth game







Not a lot is yet known about the new console version, yet these screenshots certainly look impressive

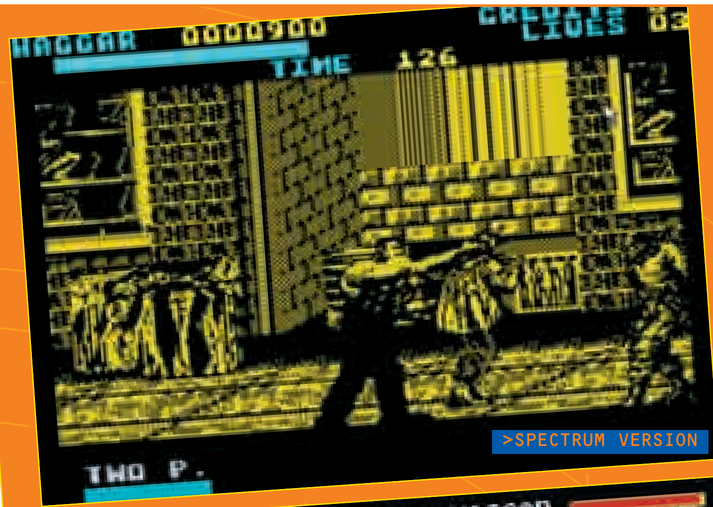


>Coin-op Conversions

Following last month's look at Ghouls 'n' Ghosts and Strider, Robert Mellor compares the home conversions of two more Capcom classics – Final Fight and Street Fighter II. Both games cornered the competition in the arcades, but how did they shape up in the home?

Having set arcades alight with a series of pioneering platform games, Capcom turned its attention to the beat-em-up genre. With inspired game designer Yoshiki Okamoto at the helm, it created two arcade games that pushed the CPS1 hardware to its limits. One of those was Final Fight, a brutal side-scrolling brawler, and the other was Street Fighter II, a one-on-one fighter that changed the arcade industry forever.





>SPECTRUM VERSION


>ARCADE VERSION



>COMMODORE 64 VERSION

>Final Fight

Taking its influences from earlier games in the genre, such as Kung Fu Master and Double Dragon, 1989's Final Fight was a simple side-scrolling beat-em-up for one or two players. The back story was equally straightforward – the daughter of Metro City mayor Mike Haggar had been kidnapped by a vicious gang known as Mad Gear, and with a couple of street fighting friends in tow, dammit if daddy wasn't going to get his little girl back.

But the game's basic concept and storyline was where the simplicity ended. Final Fight will probably go down as the greatest game of its type from the retro era. For a start, the graphics were amazing, with huge character sprites and highly detailed background graphics that featured everything from thundering subway trains to yapping dogs and angry bar patrons. The game not only looked the business, but there were also plenty of aspects to hold the player's interest, such as the multi-layered level designs, ingenious object-smashing bonus stages, a plethora of weapons to pick up along the way, and intricately designed characters that each had a unique style of fighting and their own special attack. The game was only slightly let-down by a rather drab soundtrack. A home version would later show that the compositions themselves were surprisingly good, they were just poorly implemented on the coin-op platform.

With Final Fight, Okamoto stretched the CPS1 hardware to its breaking point and delivered a worldwide arcade hit that is still remembered fondly to this day. But were the computer and console versions so memorable?

Home conversions

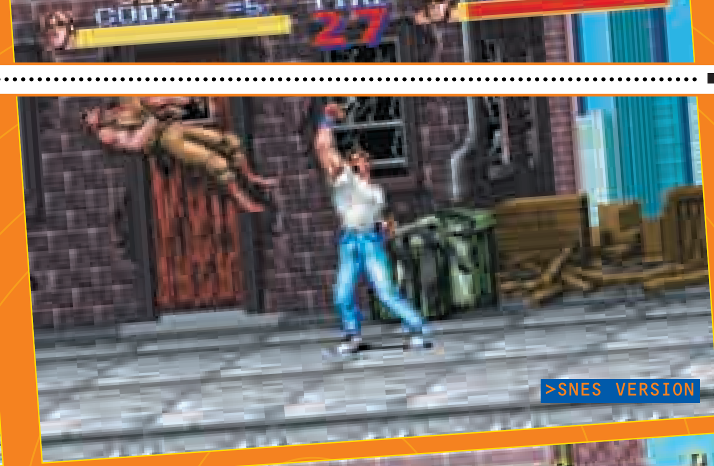
After an extremely successful arcade run, Final Fight was hot property and the game was converted to several home systems. Software publishers US Gold snapped up the home computer rights, while Capcom itself handled conversion duties for the big Japanese consoles.

Sinclair Spectrum: Creative Materials was enlisted by US Gold to bring Final Fight into the home, and its version for the Spectrum 128K was quite remarkable. The initial presentation was good, with an admirable attempt from the programmers to incorporate the coin-op's famous attract mode. All three characters were selectable, and yet again the Spectrum managed to confound its critics by featuring near-perfect monochrome renditions of the arcade's massive sprites. The backgrounds were also very detailed and while there was no in-game music, some spot FX was added to make things a little more interesting. Considering the machine that the game was running on, this was a visually stunning attempt to create a realistic home version of the game. Sadly, it was something of a chore to play, with sticky controls and sluggish reaction times. As a fighting game it was average; as a graphical showcase it was amazing.

Commodore 64: Whereas the Spectrum managed to produce something that at least looked like the arcade game, the poor C64 version fell flat on its face in all areas. Still going in 1991, the legendary 8-bit Commodore was now finding it a struggle to keep up with the pace, and its version of Final Fight is surely one of the worst coin-op conversions of all time. It really is that bad! The programmers tried their best to recreate the coin-op's gargantuan graphics but they just couldn't pull it off. The game was a blocky and unrecognisable mess, and it played as bad as it looked. The control system was slow and unresponsive, levels were boring and sparsely populated, and the scrolling was beyond sluggish. On the plus side, all three characters were selectable and a two-player option was present, but overall this was easily the worst home version of the game.



>COMMODORE AMIGA VERSION



>SNES VERSION



>NES VERSION



>MEGA-CD VERSION

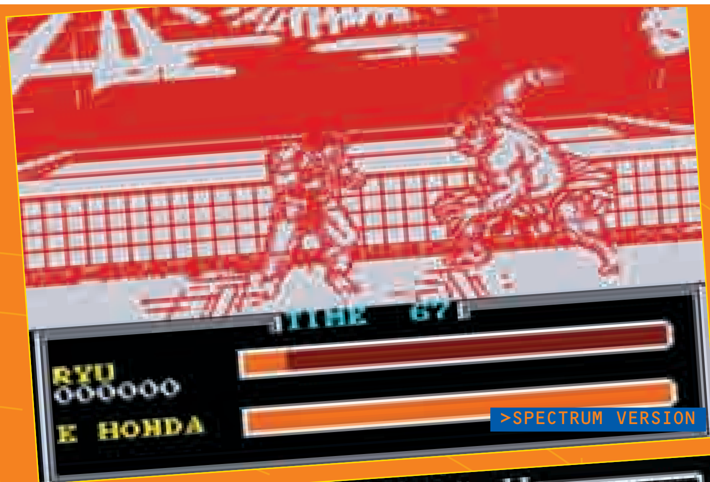
Commodore Amiga: Creative Materials was once again at the helm for the Amiga release and it succeeded in creating a pretty fine translation. Visually, the Amiga managed to accommodate the coin-op's huge graphics, while at the same time squeezing in all three playable characters, the two-player mode and nearly every level from the original. Equally impressive was the sensational recreation of the attract mode, featuring a brilliant piece of music entitled Lost In Time, which became regarded as a genuine MOD classic. Sadly, the port lacked in-game music, but made up for it with a suitable array of hard-hitting sound effects. A few character moves were lost too, most notably Haggar's spinning clothesline special, but play was generally good and strangely addictive thanks to the way you could repeatedly beat the bad guys to death by flicking the auto-fire switch on your joystick. Slowdown was always going to be an issue with a game of this size, and the Amiga port did suffer from this whenever the screen became too populated. But this was a highly satisfactory version that was a lot of fun to play.

Nintendo NES: Rather than attempting a straightforward (not to mention impossible) conversion of Final Fight, Capcom decided to take a more enlightened approach with the 1993 NES version. Using a bit of artistic licence, it created a fun and light-hearted affair called Mighty Final Fight. Ditching the massive sprites of the arcade original, Capcom instead employed mini Manga-style representations of the game's characters, not unlike those that would be seen in later Capcom coin-ops such as Super Puzzle Fighter. The game was given several new elements such as an almost comical approach, a few new character moves, story-enhancing cutscenes and a tamer plot that saw Mad Gear's leader falling in love with Jessica, rather than kidnapping her. In all, the changes were an inspired move on Capcom's part. It's a shame that Creative Materials didn't attempt a similar approach instead of trying to recreate the game on 8-bit machines that simply couldn't handle it.

Nintendo SNES: Converted by Capcom in 1992, Final Fight was one of the SNES's biggest selling points during its early life. Despite a slightly gaudy colour scheme and somewhat tinny sound, it proved to be an excellent version that was very faithful to the arcade original. Unfortunately, it suffered from a number of drawbacks and subsequently could not be regarded as the definitive home version of the title. The game was released in a time when the Nintendo was still a little too family friendly for its own good, so the game suffered from several censorship issues, most notably a toned-down attract mode and an increased amount of clothing on the more scantily clad female characters such as Roxy, who Nintendo was convinced was actually a transvestite! More criminal however was the lack of a two-player mode and the absence of Guy, leaving players to choose from either Haggar or Cody in one-player mode. Guy fans across the world cried foul, forcing Capcom to create a second version entitled Final Fight Guy that replaced Cody with the eponymous character, but sadly, it still omitted the two-player option. Overall, the SNES version was very good, but these detracting elements allowed another version to steal its crown as the best home version.

Sega Mega-CD: In 1993, Capcom used the extra storage capacity of Sega's Megadrive add-on to create one of the finest and more faithful arcade conversions ever. The Mega-CD version was, save for a few less colours, identical to the original in terms of graphics and gameplay. All the characters were present, the two-player option was there in all its co-op glory, and presentation was faultless, highlighted by an enhanced attract mode that featured full speech, extra illustrations and motion cutscenes. In retrospect, what really made this version shine was the fantastic soundtrack. Making full use of the disc format, Capcom created CD-quality audio tracks that used the original arcade machine's compositions as a basic framework, then improved upon them with new arrangements, real instruments and even a few vocals here and there. It became apparent that the original arcade tracks were just hindered by uninspired renditions, as the Mega-CD really brought them to life in the form of pulsing funk-rock! Add to this an extra Time Attack sub-game, complete with new backgrounds and music of its own, and you had the definitive home version of Final Fight.





>SPECTRUM VERSION



>ARCADE VERSION



>COMMODORE 64 VERSION

>Street Fighter II

After winning commercial and critical acclaim for Final Fight, Capcom gave Yoshiki Okamoto a crack at creating another fighting game on the CPS1 hardware, telling him that he could either produce a sequel to Final Fight or a completely different game if he so desired. Eventually, Okamoto's attention was drawn to an earlier game from the Capcom stable, 1987's Street Fighter. Although not a great success in arcades, the game had introduced several elements that made it a unique title, such as the wild assortment of colourful characters, a versus battle option and the seminal inclusion of special moves such as fireballs and devastating uppercuts. Okamoto saw the game's potential and opted to create a sequel. The result was 1991's Street Fighter II: The World Warrior, a machine that went on to become one of the most important titles in videogame history.

The three main characters, Ryu, Ken and Sagat, would reprise their roles from the first game and be joined by six new playable fighters and three additional boss characters. Each fighter had their own unique look and were gifted with strengths and weaknesses, their own brand of fighting style and a few special moves each that could be activated by a complex series of joystick and button combinations. Finally, Okamoto implemented a highly intelligent combination system that would allow players to link several moves together into an unblockable chain to inflict maximum damage.

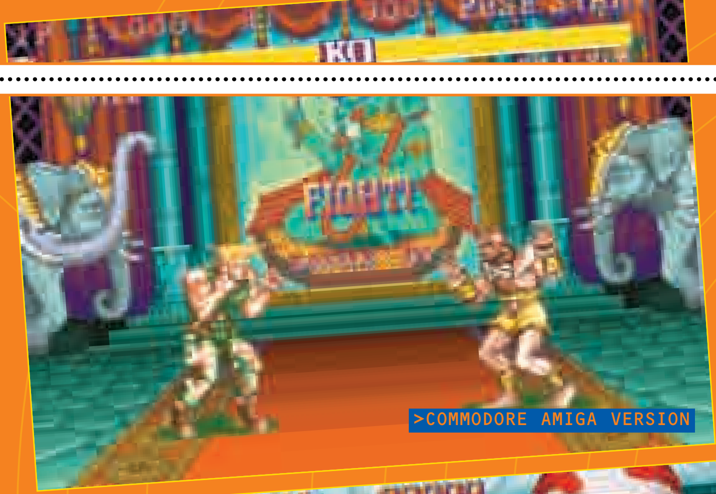
To say that Street Fighter II took the gaming world by storm is an understatement. The title took on a life of its own and turned into a lucrative franchise for Capcom, with spin-offs, upgrades, sequels and even modified bootleg versions popping up all over the place.

Home conversions

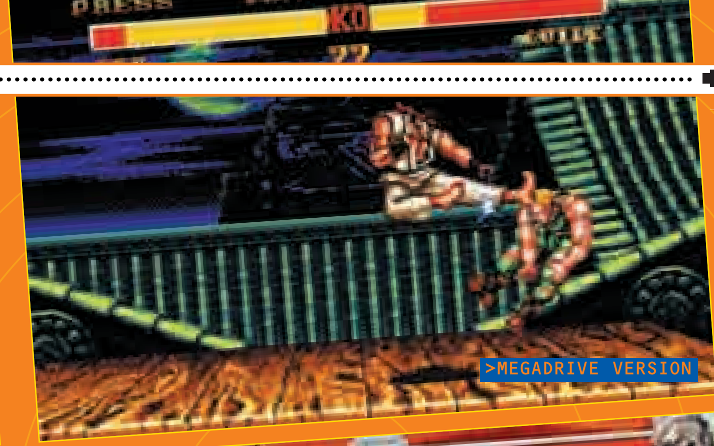
The importance of Street Fighter II in the home market simply cannot be underestimated. The exclusivity of the title that Capcom created no doubt had many executives sweating buckets, knowing they had to secure a deal to bring the game to their platform. US Gold was inevitably at the front of the queue for the home computer versions, with Capcom taking the reigns on the console conversions.

Sinclair Spectrum: "Due to machine limitations this version may differ from examples in the manual." Not the most promising line of text ever written, but that was exactly what Spectrum owners were greeted with upon loading this 1993 conversion. The game was limited to 128K machines only and the Spectrum offered large and very detailed interpretations of the coin-op's sprites and backgrounds. The colour scheme, however, was very drab and at times made it difficult to tell exactly what was going on and who was hitting whom. In-game sound was limited to uninspiring FX and the action played at a snail's pace. The biggest nightmare for Spectrum owners, though, came in the form of the multi-load system. Each character and background was designated its own respective area of code on the tape, which meant that once the program had been loaded and the characters selected, the machine first had to search for the player's fighter, then their opponent, and finally the required background – by which time the C60 tape was well into its second side. Despite the option to turn off the background graphics, this rigmarole had to be endured for every single fight. Ironically, +3 disks had been phased out by this time, so tape was the only available option.

Commodore 64: Creative Materials' C64 version obviously wasn't an arcade-perfect port either, but stood on its own two feet much more adequately than the Spectrum version. Multi-load was once again an issue, but the C64 managed a much more colourful version of the game that squeezed in every character and background, along with the requisite two-player option. Sprites were slightly gaudy and



>COMMODORE AMIGA VERSION



>MEGADRIVE VERSION



>SNES VERSION



>GBA VERSION

blocky, as was to be expected, while gameplay was no match for the slick pace of the coin-op, but the humble Commodore handled the game as well as could be expected, all things considered. On the downside, the playing area was limited – the fighting area was in the bottom half of the screen in a letterbox format, while the top half was taken up by a large status panel. The control system was always going to be limited too, considering the C64 only had one fire button, but overall this was a worthy attempt.

Commodore Amiga: Creative Materials' Amiga version was constantly delayed due to production hang-ups, only just managing to make its Christmas 1992 deadline, while impatient punters had their appetites whetted with silent rolling demos distributed on magazine coverdisks. Visually, the Amiga delivered a fine version, but it was when things started moving that problems began to occur. Viewing the rolling demos had made the game look very quick, but playing it revealed it to be very jerky. While the Amiga managed to cram in most of the moves using just one fire button, pulling off the special attacks was an arduous affair and the instruction manual didn't help matters by actually misprinting the controller motion movements for some of the attacks. Presentation was not bad, however, with the arcade's famous attract mode intact and the option to play against a friend if you so desired. At the end of the day, this conversion left buyers with mixed feelings. It wasn't bad, but it could have been great.

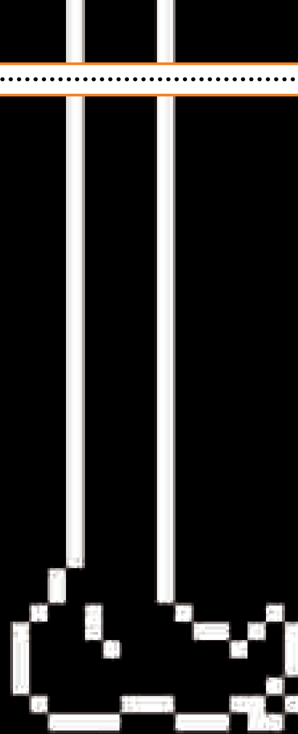
Nintendo SNES: Nintendo secured a console exclusive with Street Fighter II, making the Super Nintendo *the* 16-bit system to own in the early 90s. Thankfully, it wasn't all hype and Capcom's SNES conversion went down in history as one of the finest arcade ports to appear on a home format. Despite the letterbox display (which was naturally more apparent on PAL systems) this version was visually superb – it was detailed, accurate and colourful. All of the music was translated as well, and while it didn't quite have the same panache as its arcade counterpart, it was nevertheless a thrilling rendition that was accompanied by most of the original's speech to boot. The strongest point of this conversion, though, was the gameplay itself. The SNES's six-button pad made a massive difference to the whole affair, allowing players to use every variation of attack as they had on the arcade machine. This was an absolutely fantastic version that left Sega Megadrive owners jealous beyond belief.

Sega Megadrive: For nearly an entire year, Megadrive owners had been taunted by their SNES-loving rivals, constantly reminding them of the fact that they had the greatest home version of Street Fighter II on their machine and that, moreover, it was a console exclusive. Then it was announced that the Megadrive would indeed be blessed with a conversion and that it would be the full-blown Champion Edition upgrade, giving them one over on SNES owners who had to settle for the basic World Warrior incarnation. It was a port well worth waiting for, which turned out to be every bit as playable as the SNES version and just as faithful to the arcade original. The Megadrive had a slightly inferior look to it, along with somewhat tinny sound, but the play was what mattered and this was where the conversion really shone. The control system on three-button pads proved a little tricky, with players having to alternate between punch and kick by pressing the Start button, but thankfully six button Sega pads were just around the corner. The Sega version also managed to include more speech than its Nintendo rival and, in addition, offered up the unique Group Battle Mode, making it one of the best conversions of the game.

Nintendo GBA: One of the most recent incarnations of the Capcom legend was its version for the GameBoy Advance entitled Super Street Fighter II: Turbo Revival. This 2001 port took the basics of Capcom's 1993 CPS2 upgrade, Super Street Fighter II, and enhanced it with a few additions such as alternate stage designs, a simpler control option and slightly re-arranged music. The game also implemented the concept of 'super combos', a technique introduced in the original Super Street Fighter II: Turbo coin-op. The GBA managed an interpretation of the game that was even better than the earlier SNES incarnations. RG*





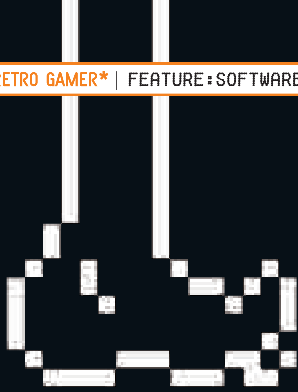


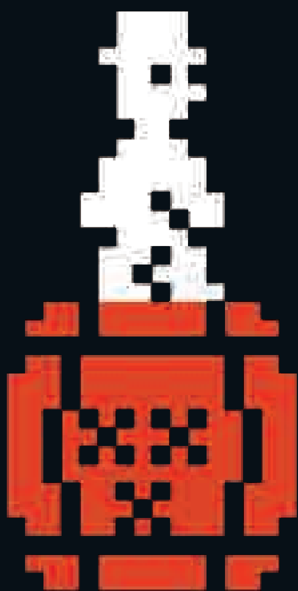
>Don't Believe the Hype

As a bitter antidote to the recent sugary-sweet top 100 games countdown, Jon Foster vents his spleen about 30 of the most overrated and over-hyped games of all time. Retro Gamer, meanwhile, wisely keeps its head down

Over the years, gaming has been a source of immense entertainment to me personally, and it's the sole reason that my bank manager charges me exorbitant interest rates on my current account. It also accounts for two student loans, the income from a Saturday job and half of my Christmas presents for the past 20 years. So this list is put together by someone who genuinely loves games and absolutely hates being let-down by them.

And that's the crux here – being let-down. It won't escape your notice that I've included a few flat-out classics, yet the simple truth is that, for whatever reason, they didn't deliver what I hoped they would. Perhaps it's because I fell for the hype, made terrible choices or just had bad taste. But the unifying factor is that I paid for them all and thus feel entitled to have a say. Right, who's with me then?

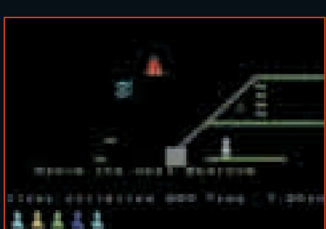




Jet Set Willy

The world is supposed to love Jet Set Willy. After all, its ambition, scope and sheer majesty is there for all to see. Frankly though, I always thought it was rubbish and its continued adulation only encourages programmers to leave games unfinished.

Compare it to the first Miner Willy game. Manic Miner features puzzles that are still taxing and intelligent, and if you worked hard enough at it you could actually complete the game. JSW, on the other hand, was a game you could only finish by cheating. A game that, if you died in the wrong place, brought you back in the same place and thus shot through all your lives in around three seconds flat. And we laughed at it, patted Willy on the back and accepted it as a quirk of brilliance. Perhaps it was. But it buggered the game up good and proper, so I find it infuriating that JSW wins the plaudits at the expense of MM. And the less said about Jet Set Willy 2 the better.

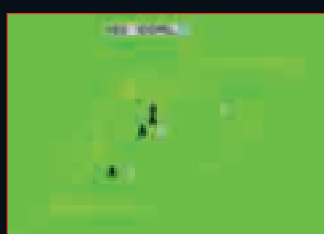


Bottom line – if we're going to celebrate a classic game, can we at least celebrate one that's actually finished? Me? My loyalties lie with Dynamite Dan...

Football Manager

No, no, no, no, no. With all due respect, Mr Toms, Football Manager was rubbish. Even back in 1982 it was rubbish. Sure, it was groundbreaking, and sure, those visual highlights were fascinating for, ooh, a good half hour. But perhaps it's time to face some basic facts.

Fact one: it was easy. Even Gerard Houllier could have made a championship winning side in an evening. And he'd have done it by spending, what, around £400K? Fact two: it was too easy. My first season, back in a damp room in 1982, saw me lifting the FA Cup after spending next to nothing in the transfer market. Fact three: it was piss easy. The best players routinely accepted very little money to come to your club, and it was never a question of if you'd win, but when.



Staggeringly, much of this remained intact in the truly dire Football Manager 2, which followed many, many years later. And Kevin Toms was kept in beard trimmers off the back of what was arguably his worst game. Dig out Software Star and President, and you'll see better evidence of what the man could do. Neither are classics, but at least you won't have finished them by the time the dirty evening movie comes on Channel Five.

Driller

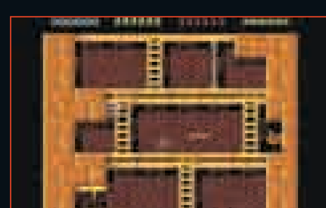
Over the years, gaming has produced some genuine innovations. And few were as revolutionary at the time as Incentive Software's Freescape system, which allowed developers to create of a full 3D world. The world moved with you and it was to play host to some quite interesting 3D adventures in the following years.



And yet it was Driller that picked up the plaudits. I suspect that even the most dedicated Incentive employee of the time would accept that Freescape, innovative as it was, wasn't really that polished by the time we got to see it. Thus, we got Driller, a technical wonder struggling to play host to an intriguing but desperately ponderous game. Undoubtedly groundbreaking, it also required a serious caffeine injection to get through it. Fortunately, Freescape evolved and played host to better games such as Castle Master, which didn't have the 'wading through treacle' feel that Driller had got down to a fine art.

Rick Dangerous

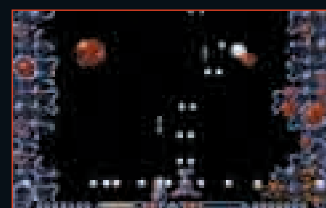
Any games reviewer who gave this a high score should, by rights, now be working as Vanessa Feltz's personal leg waxer. Because Rick Dangerous was the reason we needed games reviewers in the first place. It was dressed in lovely clothes, it was technically accomplished, it was polished and it was refreshingly free of bugs.



But it was cobblers. And here's why – it was one of the most desperately unfair games in the entire living world. The gameplay was based on you moving along, dying, learning how you died, and avoiding it the next time. That's not a fair game, that's a memory test. And a crappy one at that. A sequel followed that corrected none of the mistakes, but fortunately, they stopped short of a three-quel. Perhaps Vanessa came calling, eh?

Xenon II: Megablast

For such acclaimed coders, The Bitmap Brothers have a decidedly mixed softography. Speedball and its sequel were undoubted classics; The Chaos Engine was tremendous; Gods was very good; Cadaver was hugely underrated; and Magic Pockets was, well, forgettable. But let's talk about Xenon and, in particular, the multimedia feast that was its sequel.

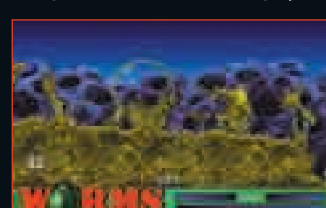


To be fair, the legendary Bitmap Brothers weren't directly responsible for Xenon II: Megablast, and perhaps that's why we got what we did – a fancy music video with a staggeringly boring shoot-em-up attached. Trading off pace, gameplay and playability in exchange for a willy waving multimedia exercise, Xenon II was nonetheless embraced by Amiga fanboys, who were so blinded by their loyalty to the machine that they forgot what a good game was. Shame on them. Dig out Uridium and give that some love instead.

Worms

It was once said of George Lucas that when Star Wars hit big, America lost potentially one of its greatest directors. And that's exactly how I feel about Worms.

Now, truth be told, when I bought my first copy of Worms I quite enjoyed it. It was a lightweight, fun game. At the time, I fondly recalled an Amiga public domain game featuring two tanks firing at each other, and sagely



pondered how clever it was of Team 17 to marry this simple concept with some welcome humour. Good on them, I thought. A good, solid, one-off hit.

Only it wasn't. An add-on pack left me feeling short changed. Worms 2 was a polished evolution of the first game. Ditto for Worms Armageddon and Worms 3. Worms Blast? A disastrous attempt at extending the franchise into the world of puzzle games. Worms World Party? I mean, come on. Worms 3D? That was just late – around five years late. And now it's Worms Fort or something like that.

Since Worms really scored big, what has Team 17 – who had previously given us the wonderful Alien Breed games, the flawed-but-interesting Project X and the enjoyable Assassin – actually done? Well, apart from skilfully manipulating and evolving a simple game into, er, a simple game, not a lot. Its efforts are exerted on endless cash-generating Worms sequels. It's sacrificed genuine risk-taking originality for a smoking jacket and pipe. Getting that George Lucas parallel yet?

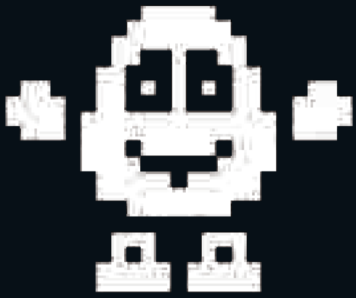
Microsoft Flight Simulator

For a very long time, until the release of the likes of Myst and The Sims, Microsoft Flight Simulator was the biggest-selling PC game of all time. And that's the problem. Flight Simulator wasn't a game – instantly distrust and seriously consider institutionalising anyone who tells you different. It was a vehemently accurate recreation of flying a plane.



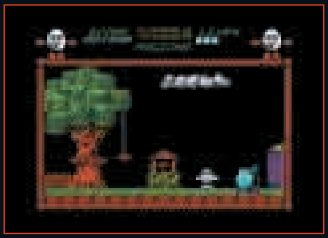
And it was impenetrable to anyone vaguely casual about these things. Dedicated fans spent a couple of hundred quid on the right kit to enjoy their Flight Sim experience. Me? Those very same funds are currently on a Budweiser balance sheet. And I bet I got more fun out of it.





Dizzy

Dizzy was, and always will be, quite an enjoyable little budget game. But why, oh why, oh why has this egg-shaped character come to symbolise all that was great about 8-bit budget games? I've no personal problem with Dizzy and quite enjoyed plenty of the egged-one's games (although that Amiga Power review that questioned when the surely-already-in-existence Dizzy Construction Kit was to be released is as valid as it once was), but frankly, Magic Knight kicked Dizzy's, er, shell.



Next time someone waffles on incessantly about Dizzy, do them a favour – show them Knight Tyme, or Finders Keepers, or Spellbound. Or just laugh at them. Your call.

Joe Blade 2

Another personal vendetta, here. The original Joe Blade was a great little budget game. Sadly, Joe Blade 2 was crap, blatantly easy and, bizarrely, was given



high scores and awards by the games mags of the time. It sold bucket loads, unlike the actually brilliant Joe Blade 3, which seemed to arrive, wave and disappear in far too little time. Thanks for letting me get that off my chest.

Hard Drivin'

True story – Hard Drivin', the game that looked so shiny and spanky, and drew you into the arcades like a videogame tractor beam, actually started life as a system for teaching driving skills. Frankly, the general public had a narrow escape. If Hard Drivin' had been used to teach driving skills, then the number of

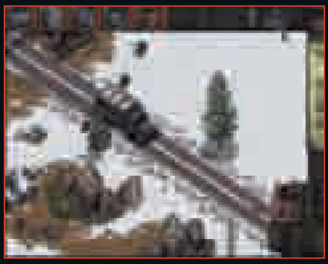


pile ups would have trebled, roads would have about 14 lanes so drivers could stay on them, and we'd have no need of speed cameras as drivers would rarely get anywhere near the speed limit without careering into oncoming traffic.

Commandos

Good graphics can hide anything, apparently. And blimey, the graphics in the so-called PC strategy game Commandos really are the business. Awesome in fact, leaving many reviewers to conclude that for a real-time strategy game, Commandos was visually exceptional.

And that's it. That point there. 'Real-time strategy'. Pah.



Not unlike the original Hitman – and don't get me started on that – Commandos was in fact a puzzle game. Not because it was designed as such, but because it was a game that required you to find one, and only one, answer to get you through a certain scenario. If you found the prescribed route, it let you through. There are 8-bit games that allow more flexibility than this, so I expect a lot more from an acclaimed and fairly contemporary title. Hence, Commandos needs to spend 10 minutes in the corner wearing a big pointy hat, while I flick elastic bands at it.

Robocod

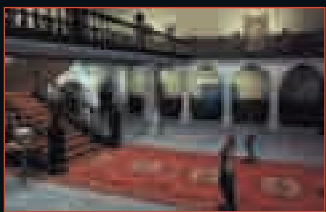
James Pond, who had the hilarious codename of Double Bubble Seven, was one of those characters clearly dreamt up in a creative meeting that involved a fag packet and a chewed Biro. And, truth be told, his first game was fun. But then the inevitable need to franchise him kicked in and the sprawling mess that was Robocod arrived.



Mario teaches us all we need to know about good platform games. They need to be tight, well structured, fair, enjoyable, long lasting and something you'd be proud to keep on your shelf. Whilst not the worst example, Robocod was sprawling, boring, and the only reason you had it on your shelf was to help prop up games that fell down. Still, it meant reviewers of the time could have fun with fish gags. Not me though. The sprats.

Resident Evil

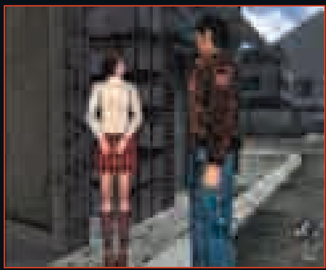
Easily one of the most tense, beautifully scripted, nerve-jangling gaming experiences on the planet. You think it, I think it. So what the hell's it doing here? Simple, it's that risible control system that breaks golden rule number one – never, ever let the controls get in the way of a good game.



The fact that we're talking about Resident Evil doesn't automatically mean it's a bad game, simply that the control system damages it so much that it perhaps doesn't deserve all the hype and accolades. That said, it's more deserving than the two films that share its name.

Shenmue

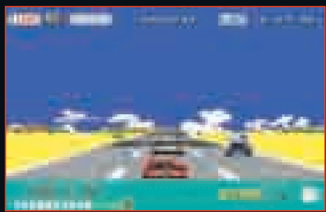
Billed as the saving grace of the Dreamcast, Shenmue was supposed to be Sega's epic. It was a game in which you went about your everyday life, albeit with a mystery of sorts to solve. It was supposed to evolve over numerous chapters and span several games. And naturally, the Dreamcast press, ever-conscious that if the machine went down then their magazines would sink with it, were understandably keen to embrace it. Truth is, at the time, so was I.



Yet time plays cruel tricks on games, and few are crueller than the tricks it's played on Shenmue. What originally looked daring, original and engrossing, has in fact been proven to be wildly unfocused. It's a case in point as to why games should be a little more scripted than they sometimes are. Why should the user have to do all the hard work of pulling a story together simply because the developer couldn't put a structured yet flexible narrative in there? Next time you see a game that promises unrivalled freedom and the chance to fully explore the game world, be aware that it might not actually be a good thing. Mind you, it could be Vice City. Probably best to ignore that advice then, eh?

OutRun

Brilliant, brilliant arcade machine. It really was. So catchy were the tunes that for months I looped the audio tape that came free on the front of C&VG (RIP) until even my cats gave up crapping on the carpet and went to annoy the neighbours instead.



The home computer versions, though. What the hell went wrong? And more to the point, what happened to the games reviewers of the time who we paid to see through shit like this? Whatever format I tried the game on, I found its entertainment value had successfully been stripped down to the ground, and I could hear the cackle of someone at US Gold as they went off to buy a new abacus to calculate just how many stupid people like me had parted with their pennies. For every reviewer who bigged this one up, whether you were bribed, blinded by the original, or just blind, you owe me. Cash.

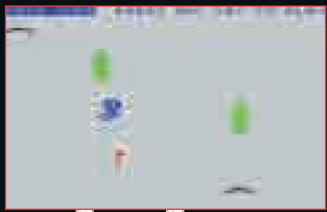
Micro Machines

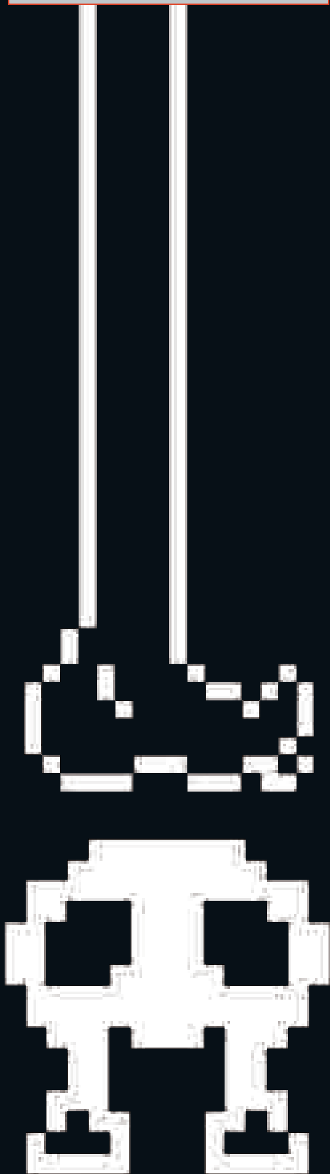
Overhead racing games are the business when they work. Nitro on the Amiga, Super Off Road Racer in the arcades, Championship/Super Sprint on just about any format, Supercars and its sequel. I loved them all. Micro Machines? Plain irritating, unfortunately.

The racing for me felt stilted throughout and once you'd got over the novelty that you were racing across a breakfast table, you were left with a professionally-put together, but strictly middle-of-the-road racer. But it seems that's all you need to get a franchise together in the videogaming industry, and so a legacy was born. And all the while, Supercars, Nitro and Super Off Road were left to rot in their garages. Shame on us.

Horace Goes Skiing

Sigh. Another game that we're supposed to get dewy-eyed about and think back to with nothing but admiration for Psion Software's odd-looking collection of pixels. Doesn't wash, I'm afraid.





The original, Hungry Horace, was a fun, brief and disposable piece of entertainment. Horace Goes Skiing nicked all the bits that worked from Frogger and then tried to fob us off with a crappy skiing segment that, even in the simplistic early days of 8-bit computing, wasn't much fun. Now to be fair, if you put a bog-eyed freak like Horace on a set of skis, the feeling the game gave you might actually be the end result. As it stands though, Horace is another middle of the road computer character that for some reason has been lofted to a position he doesn't deserve.

Lemmings

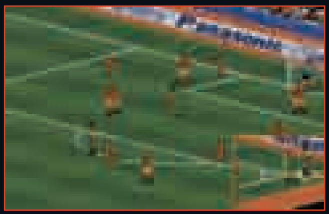
There's something wrong with a game that forces you to save creatures when you actually couldn't give a shit anymore. That, for me, is Lemmings. And frankly, I feel like a miserable sod for knocking it.



After all, it was original, detailed, polished, fair and long lasting. I was just awful at it, and thus, I hate it. I apologise, as no doubt you're now looking for my reasoned argument as to why it's overrated. I haven't got one. It's just that once you've played one level for the best part of few days and are no closer to solving it, then violence, anger, BO and psychopathic tendencies become the most important things in your life. Right Guard can solve one of those, the other three are, in my experience, only tempered by directing your vitriol at miniature creatures who want to die. The way I figure it, if that's what they want to do, then I'm happy to lend a hand.

FIFA International Soccer

It's easy to slag off FIFA games, especially as they've never hit the dizzy gameplay heights of Pro Evolution Soccer. But that would be unfair, as the franchise



has produced some good games – FIFA 98 and FIFA 2003 were releases in which everything seemed to hang together. Yet the original was a frustrating beast.

The selling point of FIFA was its graphics, which were suitably removed from those of its contemporaries. Worryingly, many played the thing and still couldn't see that they'd been sold short in terms of gameplay. This was a title that only let you control your team when it wanted to – otherwise, it did the work on your behalf. It also had that legendary cheat – all you needed to do to score a goal was stand in front of the keeper as he was about to do a drop kick. It was several years before EA Sports actually created a game that was worthy of all the visual polish that had been smeared on FIFA.

Marble Madness

This worked in the arcades, and it worked a treat. With a trackball-style controller attached to the cabinet, there was sense in intricately manoeuvring a marble to a destination point. But when the game was robbed of its proper controller, it fell apart. Thus, despite the subsequent release of a construction kit, the computer conversions of Marble Madness had lost their reason to live. They became too difficult to control, and simply didn't work anymore. Ironically, another game of the time called Gyroscope managed to pull it all off a bit better, but it would be many years before a computer could accurately do justice to the Marble Madness experience. And by then, nobody gave a monkey's about it anyway.

Impossamole

Monty Mole was a proper gaming hero for me. Wanted: Monty Mole and Auf Wiedersehen Monty cost me a shocking amount of my youth, at a point where monitoring pubic hair growth was the norm. So what the hell happened with



the last Monty outing, Impossamole? And more importantly, what about those blinkered reviewers who failed to notice that one of gaming's greatest characters had been ceremoniously dumped in a pile of gaming shit? A score from Crash, if memory serves, was enough to make me part with the best part of a tenner. So unhappy was I with the end result that I was forced to make back that 10 quid. By boycotting the next few issues.



Cannon Fodder

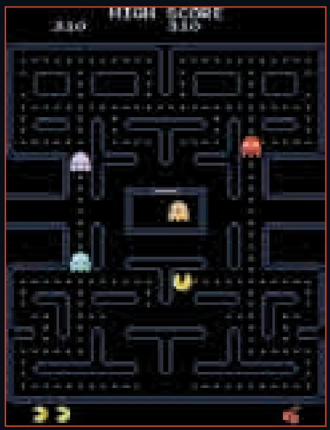
I've been dreading this one. Looking back, Sensible Software still isn't given the credit it deserves. Unjustly renowned for its wonderful football title alone, we too often gloss over the brilliance of Wizball (surely one of the best games of all time?), the utter splendidness of Mega-lo-Mania and the ground-breaking Microprose Soccer. Yet Cannon Fodder, one of a raft of games at the time that were seemingly converted to any format the developer fancied, just never clicked.



Perhaps it was the marriage of the cartoony characters to the subject matter, or the feeling that it was walking tentatively between the stools of puzzle game and strategy. Or it could be that I'm a cantankerous nobody, who deserves to sit in front of Rise of the Robots for a week to learn to appreciate just how much I should actually love well-put-together games. Who knows.

Pac-Man

The problem with the really old games, and we're talking the Pongs, the Space Invaders and the Missile Commands, is that they were so groundbreaking, you almost feel you *have* to like them. I was a wide-eyed kid when Pong was first brought out on Atari home console, and I can say in all honesty that I thought





it was shit then and I don't think it's any better now. But I do appreciate its importance in the grand scheme of things.

Pac-Man? It falls into the same camp, as far as I'm concerned. Back in the days when the family gathered round the telly to play videogames (as opposed to the solitary confinement the PlayStation now comes bundled with as standard), Pac-Man ruled the roost in our house. And OK, it was good fun in the short term. But as with Missile Command, Space Invaders, and Pong, that's all it was – a short-term rush.

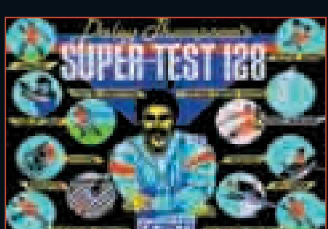


Daley Thompson's Super-Test

It's fully understandable that, due to the success of the much-loved Daley Thompson's Decathlon, Ocean Software tried to spin out a sequel. And to be fair, it tried really, really hard. Yet liking Super-Test would be like giving the thick kid in school a great grade because they really tried to be something they're not. Sadly, life can hit you with the truth in the harshest possible way.

Thus, the elements of Super-Test that succeeded were primarily the derivatives of Decathlon, ie the bit where the aforementioned kid copied from the book of someone much cleverer. The parts in which it failed were down to the fact that it couldn't read Decathlon's proverbial handwriting properly, or it decided to come up with a few ideas of its own, some of which presumably looked quite neat on those nice Konami games in the arcades.

The end result, to be fair, is no failure, but it is a mish-mash. So inconsistent are the events that it's actually tricky to enjoy the game as a coherent whole. Super-Test still earned good reviews, nice sales and another sequel. Frankly, Ocean should have stopped at one.



Weird Dreams

If you want proof that developers are happy to play with your head, then Weird Dreams provides it. If I were looking to pull a special phrase out of the book of journalistic clichés, which clearly I'm not, then I'd say it's a Marmite game – you either love it or hate it. Actually, I've never really minded Marmite, apart from an unfortunate and vomit-inducing incident when I ate a solid lump of it for a dare. But anyway, surely I can't be alone in my distaste for Weird Dreams?

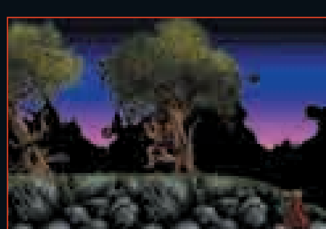


What the hell was going on? Was anything going on? Was it only me who thought it was the epitome of style over substance? Why did it become a magnet for scores north of 80%? There's a whole bevy of questions I could ask, and frankly I still don't have the answers to any of them.

Shadow of the Beast 2

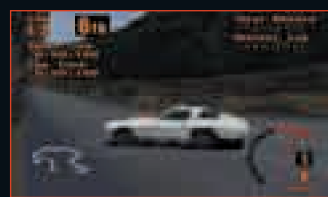
The thing that always got me about Shadow of the Beast, and particularly its sequel, was that everyone knew it was crap but didn't dare say it. I can vividly remember the playground conversations about the wonderful cutscenes and how it showed off just what computers could do. I recall us discussing our initial amazement at just what was happening on our tellies. Then there was the gameplay... we ran out of things to say at that point.

Shadow of the Beast 2 was the worst of the three, as both the first and third games had something mildly enjoyable about them. Shadow of the Beast must go down as the saga that everyone liked to talk about, yet nobody wanted to play.



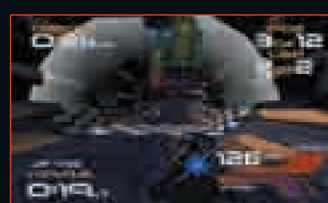
Gran Turismo

Over the years, racing games have bought heavily into realism and have tried to combine it with playability. So few games manage to get a tight balance between the two, and Gran Turismo isn't one of them. You'll get no arguments from me that it's a technical wonderment – I excitedly bought my copy on the day of release. My first thoughts? Wow! My second thoughts? Is that it...? Where's the fun? Where's the excitement? Where's the adrenaline? Where's my receipt?



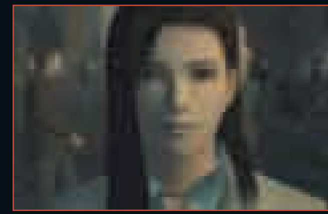
Wipeout

One of a couple of PlayStation mega-hits that I had problems with. Wipeout – and I refuse to replicate the bizarre capitalisation of certain letters in the title – was a title that shifted umpteen consoles, yet always felt distinctly middle of the road to play. On the plus side, it was one of the titles that put the PlayStation on the map. On the downside? It generated sequels that were the epitome of the law of diminishing returns.



Metal Gear Solid 2

To my mind, there's a very clear distinction between watching a movie for entertainment and playing a game. Metal Gear Solid 2 doesn't seem to get that. The original MGS was just about tolerable, because in spite of the endless, hugely uninteresting cutscenes, there were some lovely

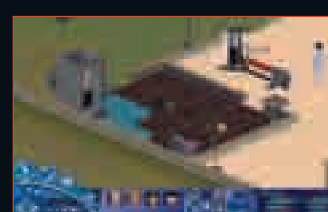


gameplay touches. The sequel? Ah, that's where the egos seemed to take hold. "Look what we can do," the programmers perhaps ventured. "We've always wanted to make a movie, so we can do that, and stick bits of game between it." And they did. The result? You spent so much time watching Metal Gear Solid 2 that you were shocked when the bloody thing asked you to pick the joypad back up. In the right hands, cutscenes can enhance games immeasurably. In the hands of this developer, they could be patented as an insomnia cure.

The Sims

Let's end with a more recent abomination. Without question, The Sims is the most overrated, undeserving game in the history of the entire world. Ignoring the fact that it's derivative of Little Computer People, this is a title in which you invent pretend people and watch them go about their pretend lives. That, my friends, isn't escapism. That's what I'm trying to escape by turning a computer on in the first place. It's a game where a wife nags a husband. Where you have to go to work on time. Where you invite insufferable relatives round for agonisingly extended barbecues. In short, it's a game that realises a good two dozen circumstances that have appeared at one time or another on divorce documents. And then there's the add-on packs – take your pretend people on holiday! Turn them into celebrities! Buy 'em a budgie!

What's particularly disturbing is that it threatens to spawn a sub-genre. Singles was released this year, with the aim of making pretend people have sex. See? This is the legacy that The Sims has left us. And Little Computer People was such a terrific game, too. RG*



eMag



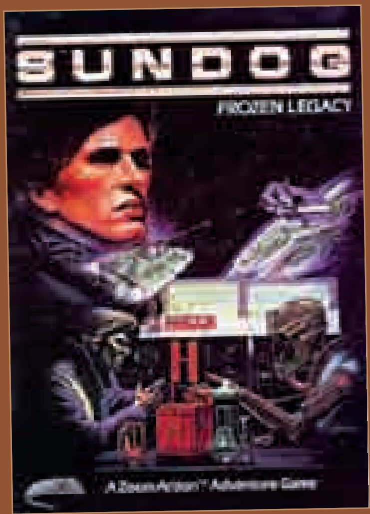


>Mastering Chaos

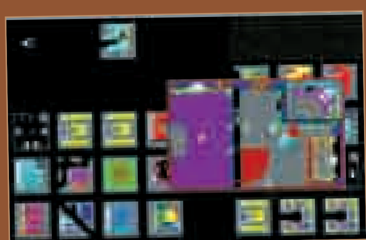
Dungeon Master drifts in and out of Retro Gamer with frequent regularity. Whether it's someone's selection as a Desert Island Disk, or in a round-up of classic games, Dungeon Master has featured in every issue to date. A dedicated feature was clearly in order, and DM devotee Richard Hewison was the ideal man to delve deeper

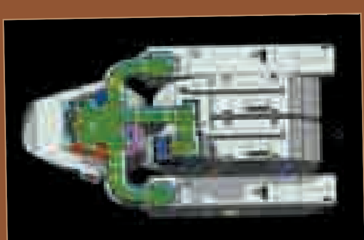
In the mid 1980s, role-playing games were generally disregarded by mainstream gamers as slow and dull compared to the instant gratification of arcade shoot-em-ups and driving games. Fans of the genre often had to make do with turn-based RPGs that had basic graphics and sound, or text entry games that had neither.

However, the move from the slow, low-resolution 8-bit micros to their faster, higher-resolution 16-bit cousins gave developers the chance to create more demanding and more atmospheric games. It was from this heady change in technology that a small San Francisco-based software company emerged to create a graphical RPG that would take the Atari ST market by storm, create a slew of conversions, two official sequels, inspire dozens of similar games from other publishers, and ultimately create its very own game genre. The name of the game was Dungeon Master.

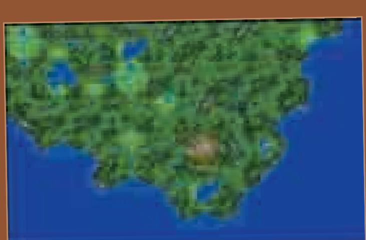












Sundog: Frozen Legacy first appeared on the Apple II, but it was the Atari ST version that landed FTL its first big hit

Light fantastic

Oasis Systems was a small software publishing company owned and run by San Diego local Wayne Holder and his partner (and future wife), Nancy Jones. The company was named after Wayne's house, which was called The Oasis. A number of his friends and former classmates used to gather every Wednesday night at the house to discuss computers and technology, before heading off to the local arcades.

Oasis Systems first published a successful spell-checking utility for the CP/M operating system called The Word (later updated and released as The Word Plus), and Wayne was soon looking to branch out into games software. In the summer of 1982, Wayne persuaded his old high-school friend Bruce Webster to resign from his current job and help set up Faster Than Light (FTL). A year earlier, Bruce had contacted Wayne regarding a play-by-phone computer game called Blows Against The Empire (pinched from the title of a 1970 Jefferson Starship album). This BBS-based game collapsed after the promised investment failed to materialise, but the two friends remained in contact.

Bruce already had a strong gaming background, having written regular articles for a couple of US game magazines, including Computer Gaming World. He was also an avid board and RPG player, so he was a natural choice to help set up a games division.

The first FTL title was a science-fiction strategy game, originally developed for the 48Kb Apple II but eventually released for the expanded 64Kb model. This game started life as a conversion of a popular board game called Star Smuggler, but when the manufacturer's parent company went bust, the licence went with it. The game was therefore abandoned and then re-designed from the ground up to eventually become Sundog: Frozen Legacy.

Whilst Sundog was still being developed, Oasis Systems continued to develop and publish applications, including one called Punctuation & Style. It also produced some custom spell-checking modules for other software publishers, including one for the very first version of Microsoft Word. However, as the games side took off, the applications side of the business was quietly phased out.

Word gets around

With the Apple II version of Sundog nearing completion in early 1984, Wayne Holder started looking for someone to produce the artwork for the packaging. As part of this search, he telephoned local San Diego artist David Darrow, as David himself explains: "To his surprise, when he introduced himself on the phone, I replied, 'Wayne Holder? Of The Word Plus fame?' He laughed at the idea that an artist would know that he wrote the world's first spelling-checker software, but didn't know there was a budding computer geek behind the airbrush and coloured pencils I used. I had just bought a Kaypro 10 (CP/M system) and was amazed by Wayne Holder's program.

"I met with them at their original office known as Oasis Systems, and a friendship and business relationship was born. They needed a piece of art that looked like a movie poster for Sundog. They were so pleased with that artwork, that I became their artist, doing covers for four more games..."

Sundog: Frozen Legacy was released in March 1984 at the West Coast Computer Fair in San Francisco, and was generally well received. A revised and updated version was released six months later, after which Bruce Webster called it a day and unexpectedly resigned. FTL's first few years had been an extremely creative but intense period, and Bruce felt burned out by the experience. As a result, he didn't touch computer programming for over four years. However, he continued with IT by teaching Computer Science at Brigham Young University and writing IT articles for magazines like BYTE and Macworld. Bruce later became a contributor to the Computer Dictionary, published by Microsoft Press in the early 1990s.

Dungeon dweller

Sometime after Bruce Webster left in late 1984, FTL became FTL Games, and Oasis Systems became Software Heaven Inc. FTL Games then took on new staff and were busy preparing to port Sundog over to the brand-new 16-bit Atari ST. The ST conversion became FTL's first big commercial success, and a number of the programmers and artists from Sundog went directly to work on the next project in the pipeline, Dungeon Master. They included Doug Bell (co-founder of games publisher PVC Dragon) and Andy Jaros, who had initially joined FTL with an idea for an adventure game before being put to work on the Sundog ST conversion.

Dungeon Master (DM to its fans) was the result of much brain storming at FTL during the closing stages of the ST Sundog

conversion. Although Sundog was a good game, it suffered from "bad design practices" as far as the programmers were concerned. Too much of the game had been "hard coded" and whatever the next project was going to be, it needed to be written in a more efficient manner.

A few of the FTL team were adventure or RPG fans, so the type of game they wanted to develop next was obvious. After choosing to write the new game using the highly portable programming language C (rather than using Pascal and 6502 assembly code, as had been the case with Sundog), an in-house tool called the Dungeon Construction Set was written to enable the design of the dungeon level to be as easy as possible. FTL also created a compact Dungeon Database to further improve the efficiency of the coding. Only once the basic game engine had been designed and implemented did the plot for DM really begin to evolve.

Nancy Jones (later to become a prolific and successful fantasy novelist) wrote the prologue for the DM manual. It told of a powerful wizard called the Grey Lord, his dungeon beneath Mount Anaias, his powerful Firestaff, and the fabled and long-lost Power Gem, hidden somewhere in the fires of the mountain.

The Grey Lord's failed attempt to recover the Power Gem affected both himself and his trusted apprentice, Theron. They were both cursed to exist in limbo. However, the Grey Lord also became divided – one part became Lord Librasulus ('The Restorer of Order'), whilst the other part became the evil Chaos. Many heroes were sent by Librasulus into the dungeon to find and return with the Power Gem. Few survived to tell the tale, and those who did spoke of monsters and traps in abundance, created by Chaos to prevent recovery of the Gem. The prologue concluded with Librasulus reluctantly sending Theron into the dungeon to gather a party of adventurers for one last attempt at recovering the Gem, denying Chaos the chance to enslave the world.





Dare you enter The Grey Lord's dungeon and retrieve the Power Gem?

Choose your Champions

DM began with the player entering the 'Hall of Champions' – a dungeon level devoid of monsters, but with two-dozen framed portraits hanging on the walls, containing the frozen souls of champions who had previously perished. These souls had been trapped and put on display by Chaos himself, to ward off other adventurers.



Which characters will you choose to join your party?

The player could choose to resurrect or re-incarnate up to four of the champions for the quest. Resurrecting a champion from the Hall meant keeping their original abilities and skills, whilst re-incarnating them meant they forgot their skills but benefited instead from greater physical abilities. In RPG terms, it was a choice between choosing a pre-rolled character or taking pot-luck and creating a new one. The latter option allowed the player to create a new name for the champion, but they couldn't change their gender or physical appearance.

The resurrected champions all had varying abilities as a fighter, wizard, ninja or priest. In total, there were 15 ability levels to aspire to, starting as a lowly Neophyte and ending up as an Arch Master. As experience was gained, their abilities would slowly increase, with each level boost requiring twice the experience of the previous one.

Although the player didn't know it at the start of the game, fighters played a big role in the early stages, whilst wizards and priests (both capable of casting magic spells) became pivotal later on. It was therefore important for the player to have a well-balanced group of characters in their party, although once they had finished the game, some players took on the challenge of finishing it with the worst, or the shortest, or sometimes with just the one champion!

Each champion had Health, Stamina, Mana and Load levels that fluctuated throughout the game. The first three were

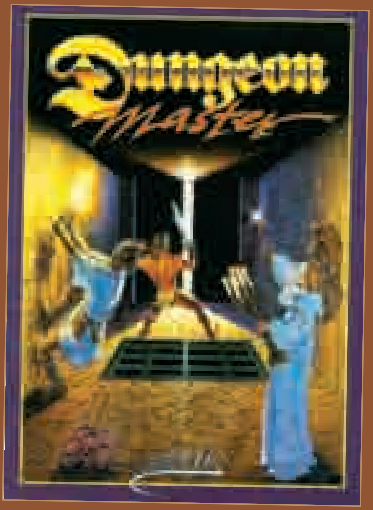
>Cover story

Following his work on Sundog, David Darrow was asked to create the cover artwork for DM, and he decided to use local people as models. "In the foreground is my now ex-wife, who had to hold a very heavy candelabra for the photos I shot for reference," revealed David. "The guy grabbing the torch was programmer Andy Jaros, and the muscle-dude in the background was some guy I found at a gym. I walked into a fitness centre and asked the receptionist if there was a really huge guy there who she thought might like to pose for pictures for a 'hero video game cover' and she went and got him. I paid him to come to my home and pose for the pictures with a fluorescent bulb in his hands as a sword.

"The woman's costume was really a modified night gown, the muscle man's stuff was invented, and Andy Jaros brought his own costume. Yeah, he owned all that stuff!

"I painted the cover about four or five times the size of the retail box on a gessoed masonite panel. I used airbrushed liquitex acrylic and coloured pencils to render it. It took about three weeks, because the technique was all new to me, and I felt under tremendous pressure. That was my own doing. FTL was very patient with me."

David took his inspiration from artist Drew Struzan, who has painted a large number of famous film posters over the last 25 years, including Raiders of the Lost Ark, Blade Runner, Back to the Future I, II and III and more recently, Star Wars Episode I and Hellboy, to name but a few.



David Darrow's Dungeon Master artwork, seen here on the original Atari ST version of the game

>Spell bound

The 'magick' system used in DM consisted of a series of runes, each with its own 'magickal' syllable. These runes were divided into the four known influences – power, element, form and alignment. Additional runes controlled each of the influences. There were six runes for each influence, making a total of 24. Thankfully, the manual explained them all in great detail.

Each rune used an amount of Mana when it was cast. Mana was slowly restored to a champion during rest, but there were other methods for recovering Mana. These included drinking a few 'Ee' potions, but only if the player had the foresight to prepare some in advance. The total amount of Mana that each champion could call upon increased as their ability levels improved. A Neophyte wizard would only be able to muster a few weak 'magical torch' spells before expiring their Mana supply, but a Master wizard would be able to cast dozens of powerful spells before running low.

Various scrolls found inside the dungeon gave clues to rune combinations that the player could try, as well as occasionally hinting at other general clues. If the relevant champion had enough Mana, the player could also experiment with various rune combinations just to see what would happen.



available as bar charts above the main game screen. Health became depleted during battle, Stamina would be sapped without rest, Mana would reduce whenever a spell was cast, and the Load would increase as more items were carried. Champions also had a series of additional statistics for Strength, Dexterity, Wisdom, Vitality, Anti-Magic and Anti-Fire. Again, their values would fluctuate throughout the game, and the maximum attainable was based on the champion's current ability levels.

The champions found in the Hall were named by FTL after a variety of characters, either real or from books or films. For example, Chani Sayyadina Sihaya was Paul Atreides' Fremen wife in Frank Herbert's Dune. Azizi Johari was a Playboy Playmate from 1975, and Gothmog was Morgul's Lieutenant at the Battle of Pelennor in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. Other champions included Leif the Valiant, who was inspired by Leif Eriksson, the Viking explorer who was the first European to ever set foot on North American soil, whilst Zed was a non-player character from Sundog: Frozen Legacy.

Taking control

One of the crucial elements that FTL worked on constantly during the design phase of the game was the control interface. What began as a complex point-and-click system was eventually simplified until it became intuitive. This was especially important when you consider that the game was played in real time, and often the player would need to change their party's formation, swap items and then reach into a character's backpack and get an item to use within a couple of seconds of being attacked.

The game system only had a few screens to offer. The main 'dungeon view' was the most important, dominated by the window into the pseudo-3D environment. A second screen (accessed by right-clicking or pressing a function key) showed the items contained in each champion's backpack. This screen also showed the champion's statistics and abilities in more detail, and also gave access to the third and final screen where the player could save/load their progress, or quit/restart the game. The action and movement icons (that included left, right, forward, back, turn left, and turn right) were positioned to the right of the screen, and this area also gave the player the options related to the items held in each champion's hands, which were always displayed along the top of the screen.

Running around the dungeon corridors was achieved either through clicking on the on-screen movement icons, or via the keyboard's cursor keys. Most players soon learned that using the keyboard to move around was far quicker than using the mouse, especially if they were running away (Monty Python style) from the monsters. They could then use the mouse to fight or cast spells as they retreated. This combination of mouse and keyboard controls used in tandem pre-dated games like Doom (where this adept skill was a necessity) by about six years.

The party often had to sleep to recover spent abilities. Whilst resting, they were vulnerable to attack from monsters, so the player had to find a dead end, far away from any danger (preferably in an area of the dungeon they had already cleared) before they could safely send them to sleep. Unfortunately, rest could not cure all of their ailments. For example, sleeping whilst poisoned accelerated a champion's decline. In that circumstance, their only chance of survival was to find an antidote.

It was almost impossible to go through the entire dungeon without any of the champions dying in combat. When a champion was killed, there would be an ear-piercing shriek and their bones, along with all of their possessions, would drop to the floor. Thankfully, certain dungeon levels had reincarnation shrines (called the Altar of VI) where the bones of the deceased could be placed. They would then be brought back to life, complete and intact.

DM employed a pseudo-3D technique to display the game environment. Everything was derived from a series of pre-drawn 2D graphics. The dungeon environment was pieced together jigsaw-style from individual 'sprite' graphics of walls, floors, ceilings, etc. However, the game world behaved as if it were 3D, so if you threw an item it would travel a certain distance based on the champion's ninja abilities and whether any obstacles got in the way (or not as the case





Dungeon Master featured a simple but intuitive point-and-click interface

may be). Monsters could also be seen approaching from a distance, and the party could turn on the spot in 45-degree movements as well as move a step forward, back or sideways.

Hunt and gather

DM was littered with all kinds of items – from scrolls, food, rocks and weapons, to keys, gems, potions and armour. Items had their own particular abilities. They could improve a champion's abilities, or add options when readied in a champion's hand. For example, a full Storm Ring could cast lightning, a Staff of Claws could confuse monsters, whilst a Teowand could calm monsters, or create one of two different shields – a Spellshield (to protect against magickal attacks) or a Fireshield (useful against other monsters, including the Dragon).

Each character could only carry so many items before their 'load' became a burden. Ultimately, a character weighed down with too many items would slow down the entire party – the speed that the group could move or run through the dungeon was always dictated by the speed of the slowest member. Although the idea of not leaving behind the slowest or weakest member of the party sounded noble and heroic, this feature was dictated by the game mechanics - the party couldn't be split up, even if the player wanted to! The four champions therefore had no choice but to stick together.



The dungeon floors were filled with items to retrieve and use

Picking up containers (chests, boxes etc) allowed the champions to carry more objects than their backpack would normally allow. However, the combined weight still contributed to the champion's overall load. Obviously, items could be dropped or given to other stronger characters if required.

To help keep the DM world consistent, any items dropped on one level of the dungeon would still be there when the player returned to it later. This was useful, as players could stockpile items that they couldn't carry (usually by staircases to other dungeon levels). They could then nip back and retrieve the items when they needed them later. One way to lose items was to have them stolen by a Giggler. These weird-looking spindly little creatures would run up to the party, make a funny giggling noise, swipe some items and then run away again. They were quite fast and the only way to recover the items was to give chase and kill it!

There were a few oddities with the game physics in DM that the player had no choice but to accept. For example, they could grab a lit torch from a sconce on a wall, and immediately place it inside a backpack for later use. The torch would immediately extinguish, only to somehow re-light itself when next taken out of the backpack! However, torches did have a limited amount of time before they dimmed and permanently expired. Keys could also only be used once, as the locks would 'gobble' them up!

Monster squad

DM contained over 20 different types of monster to battle. This menagerie included Mummies, Stone Golems, Pain Rats, Ghosts, Gigglers, Oitus (giant spiders), Rock Piles, Screamers, Scorpions, Skeletons and a fire-breathing Dragon! Each monster had its own (hidden) statistics including speed, armour, health, hit probability, bravery, awareness, magic and poison resistance to name but a few.

Some creatures disappeared in a puff of smoke when vanquished, whilst others helpfully left behind food that would sustain the party for a while. Worm Rounds were always good for snacking on, whilst Dragon Steaks were definitely at the top of most adventurers' dinner menus – such a shame there was only one (large) Dragon to defeat.

Andy Jaros produced the graphics for DM. Although there wasn't much variety in the dungeon environment, this was more than made up for by the variety of monsters and items that the player encountered during the quest.

It's interesting to realise that none of the monsters in DM had more than four frames of animation. These included front standing, front attacking, back and one side (mirrored for left and right). It's a testament to FTL that most players never noticed, or if they did, didn't feel that it mattered!

Sound also played an important part in DM, despite the fact that the game had long periods of relative silence. It was exactly this minimalist approach to sound that helped to make the game so atmospheric. The distant clanking of a far away door or gate opening, or the sudden loud screams of monsters lurking just around the corner immediately put the player's nerves on edge. As later versions of DM were developed, sound effects were improved to include the sound of monsters moving around in the dungeon.









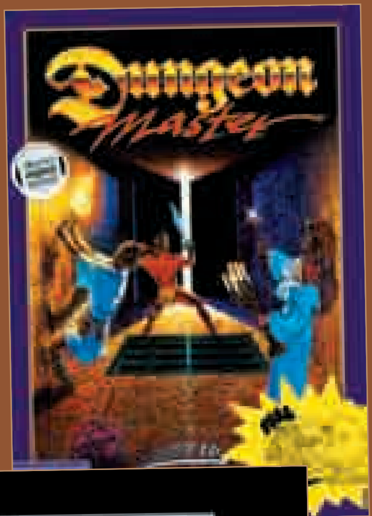


Just some of the monsters you'd encounter as you travelled deeper into the dungeon

>DMGS

Perhaps the most interesting conversion was for the Apple IIGS, as it featured an exclusive extra dungeon level which could be accessed by pressing the Apple II's 'option' key whilst clicking on the dungeon's 'Enter' button at the very start of the game. The starting location looked the same as the regular DM game. The end of the first corridor had "Welcome Brave Kids" carved into the stone wall. Further tips and hints were found on the walls as the player explored the initial area, which included a one-room version of the Hall of Champions that contained 11 portraits to choose from.

Only once the player had recruited some champions would the game let them through the next door. From here they could collect and fill a water-bag, tool up with a few extra weapons and choose from three sets of stairs leading downwards. One staircase lead to the Treasure Maze with Gigglers ("Beware of the Kleptomaniacs!"), whilst another took the player to the Shooting Gallery. Some of these dungeons included "Push A Button – Make A Monster", where you could generate a monster to fight against. Another area gave the player a chance to battle with a Dragon in its den. This was a training area or tutorial for the quest that lay ahead.







The Apple IIGS version featured a new 'Kid Dungeon' which was basically a training exercise

Going public

DM was first publicly revealed at the June 1986 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas as a self-running slideshow on the Atari ST. Mirrorsoft's Jim MacKonochie was impressed with what he saw, and immediately snapped up the European distribution rights for both Dungeon Master and Oids (FTL's shoot-em-up inspired by the Williams coin-op Gravitar) after he met with FTL's Marketing Director, Russ Boelhauf.

The deal between FTL and Mirrorsoft ultimately proved to be good business for both companies, as over two-thirds of FTL's DM sales came from Europe. However, it was so long between the deal being signed and the game finally appearing (over a year later) that Jim MacKonochie had all but forgotten about it when it finally appeared in late 1987.

Such was the clamour for DM when it was finally released that a badge was produced for retailers, proudly proclaiming "Yes – we have Dungeon Master!". The game sold out as soon as it hit the shelves, and FTL in the US and Mirrorsoft in the UK had a hard time keeping up with demand.

The first release of DM for the ST (v1.0) had a few bugs near the end of the game that were quickly fixed. Upgrades were available for a nominal postage fee if players returned their original game disks to FTL or Mirrorsoft. Other minor revisions and tweaks were continually being made, especially as further conversions to other formats were being written. For example, the player originally had to use a waterskin or flask to drink from the fountains. This was revised in later versions so you only had to select the fountain to take a drink. Other changes included being able to select walls to hear if they were false or not, and the removal of the useful lockpick item.

DM went on to win dozens of accolades from the computer press. It was voted Game of the Year for 1988 across Europe and the US, and if imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then FTL became exceptionally flattered over the next five or six years, as a number of publishers jumped on the bandwagon and produced similar games.

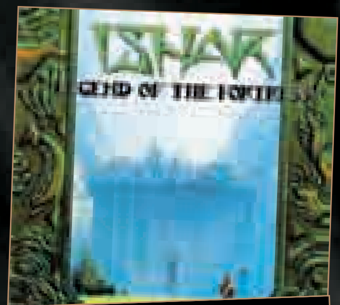
Westwood Associates (later to become Westwood Studios) created Eye of the Beholder for TSR, a DM-clone with improved graphics, more features and the official AD&D rules, based on the Forgotten Realms tabletop RPG. This game spawned two further sequels, with a new developer completing the third and final part in the series. By then, Westwood had set itself up as a publisher and developer, and went on to produce its own DM homage a few years later, called Lands of Lore: Throne of Chaos, which also spawned a couple of sequels.

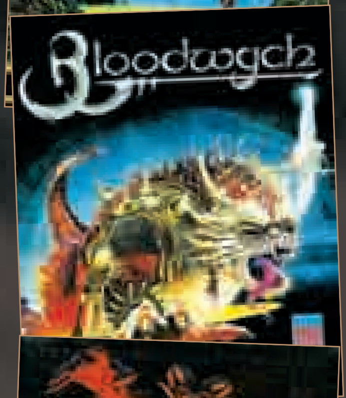
Despite being the European distributor for DM, Mirrorsoft produced Bloodwych, a DM-style RPG that added a two-player, split-screen feature. This game was also converted to run on the older 8-bit Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad CPC computers. Other games that were obviously inspired by DM included the Ishar series, Tony Crowther's Captive (published by Mindscape), two Abandoned Places games, and Black Crypt (published by Electronic Arts).

DM's popularity also spawned a small 'cottage industry' of its own, as home-developed (and strictly unofficial) DM editors began to appear, along with other unofficial maps and full-blown solutions, detailing every level of the dungeon.

Preaching to the converted

A '1Mb only' Commodore Amiga conversion of DM, with improved stereo sound effects, appeared the following year, along with the usual minor tweaks and improvements by FTL. Other more







The massive popularity of Dungeon Master unsurprisingly led to many similar adventure titles

exotic conversions were to follow over the next few years, including Japanese-language versions for the PC9801, the X68000 and FM Towns machines. The latter version came on CD-ROM and included CD audio tracks that played during the game. The music was also released as a standalone CD album, simply called Dungeon Master – The Album.

It took a couple of years before a PC version appeared. When it did, it came supplied with an additional hardware add-on called the FTL Sound Adapter which allowed PCs that didn't have soundcards (quite common in the very early 1990s) the chance to hear the digitised sound effects.

As the console market matured, DM was eventually converted onto the SNES and the Mega-CD/Sega-CD. NEC's PC Engine/TurboGrafx received a restricted version of the game called Theron's Quest, which had a traditional Japanese-style animated intro, and included seven mini-dungeons to explore.

One conversion that was started but never finished was for Commodore's short-lived CDTV. The main technical stumbling block for this version was the severe lack of space on the machine's memory cards for saved game files. It was a problem that neither Commodore nor FTL were able to resolve.





The Japanese Super Famicon version featured alternative coverart, while NEC consoles received a stripped-down version of the game entitled Theron's Quest

Chaos reigns

Thanks to the design and programming ethos that FTL adopted whilst creating DM, the ability to have additional data disks was easily achievable. This was a wise move, from both a creative and a business perspective, enabling FTL to create further DM adventures without having to write masses of new code.

However, as FTL began designing the extra dungeons, the scope of the project slowly outgrew their original data disk intentions and Chaos Strikes Back (CSB) eventually became a standalone game in its own right. There were advantages to taking this approach. For starters, new graphics could be added to the DM world, and that meant new monsters (over a dozen). It also meant that players didn't have to own the original game to play the follow-up.

FTL had always been keen to listen to fans of DM, and often asked players to contact it with suggestions and comments. Some of these ideas found their way into CSB. One of the new features enabled players to amend the portraits of the champions via a Utility Disk that was supplied with the game. This disk also allowed players to import their champions from DM and give them all updated (pre-defined) portraits. However, none of their items survived the transition from DM to CSB.

The CSB Utility Disk also included a Hint Oracle program. The player could load their save-game file into the Oracle and it would give hints about the surrounding location. The player was therefore less likely to see potential spoilers for sections of the game that they had yet to encounter.

The CSB box contained the usual instructions, a disk, a slightly cryptic poster and a coin. This coin showed the face of Chaos on one side, and "Danger thus reveals its face" on the other. The box was similar to DM's, and proudly proclaimed "Expansion Set #1" along the top, even though the game ended up as a standalone product. It was simply a case of printing the boxes far in advance of the game being finished.

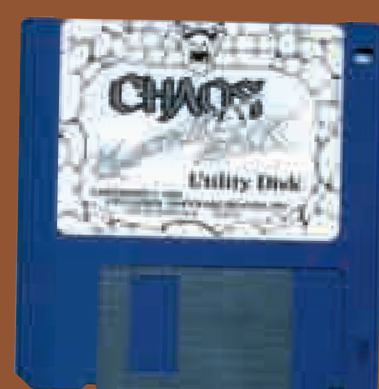
Curiously, instead of new artwork, the box featured the original DM painting. As David Darrow explains: "After Dungeon Master came out, over time I began reading reports that concerned me about the

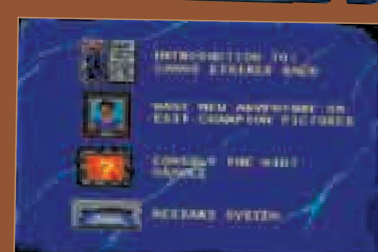


Despite the packaging, Chaos Strikes Back proved to be much more than a DM data disk



The CSB prologue mentioned a coin and, lo and behold, one was included in the box





The handy CSB Utility Disk included a hint system amongst other things

>Help!

Chaos Strikes Back featured 10 dungeon levels, or 11 if you counted The Prison, compared to DM's 13, but mapping the game on graph paper became extremely difficult. Thankfully, help would soon be at hand.

A few months after the game's release, FTL published the official Adventurer's Handbook, which contained full maps and a detailed solution. This book became an essential guide for the Mirrorsoft support team, which had to take the phone calls from players stuck in the dungeon.



Help at hand – official guides were quickly published to guide foolhardy adventurers out of trouble

obsessions some people got with RPG. In particular I was concerned about occultist overtones (or greater) in dungeon/demon games, and due to my faith, I asked not to be included in future dungeon/demons-type games after that. I threw away my business relationship with them for the life of the company, but I had to do what my heart told me." Despite his reluctant decision, David, Bruce and Wayne still remain friends to this day.

The new quest

There were two different endings to the original DM, with cryptic clues to both written in various scrolls found lying around in the dungeon. The first involved taking the Firestaff (without the Power Gem) all the way back to the dungeon entrance. Once there, the player was met by Lord Librasulus, who would then destroy the party for failing to discover the secret of the Firestaff.

The second ending involved combining the Firestaff and the Power Gem, and then finding Chaos. A particularly adept wizard was required to cast dozens of 'Fluxcage' spells which would then fuse the two objects together when Chaos was surrounded on all four sides. Of course, the Fluxcages didn't last for long, and Chaos had a nasty of habit of moving about and blasting the party with spells of his own! Once entrapped, Chaos was re-united with Lord Order and so the Grey Lord was restored to the world.

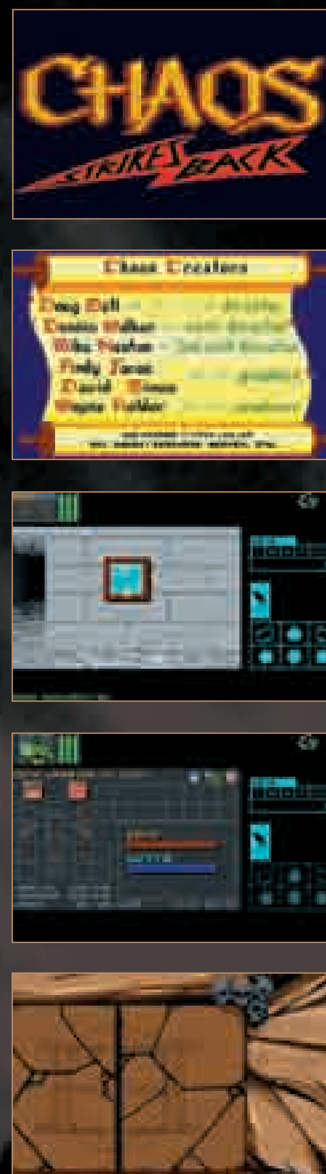
Unsurprisingly, CSB builds on the more favourable second ending. The prologue revealed that Chaos had predicted his own defeat, and had created a new dungeon to exact his revenge. Within this new dungeon, Chaos created a Forge of Fulya, which produced a seething, poisonous black flame. In it, he mined four chunks of Corbum, a substance that drew Mana from the world. With this Corbum, Chaos hoped to permanently detach himself from the Grey Lord. The Corbum ore had to be found and destroyed to prevent the return of Chaos.

The game design for CSB was a lot less linear than DM. The quest required the party to locate the four Corbums and destroy them by throwing each one into the Fulya pit. Unfortunately, the game was full of hidden traps and teleporters to confuse and disorientate the player. Pits would often drop the party two or three levels down, with no easy way of getting back to where they had fallen. There were also limited supplies of food and water, randomly placed items and much tougher monsters!

If the player was starting from scratch, they had to firstly explore The Prison, where they could rescue new characters for their party, including many more non-human characters compared to the original DM. The player would then import these characters into the Utility Disk and export a CSB-compatible save file, which placed the party at the very start of the game. This feature also accommodated a save-game from DM to be imported.

Once in the game proper, CSB immediately put the party in mortal danger from armoured worms inside a dark and dingy dungeon. Unknown to the player, the party were standing on a floor-switch that was generating the worms!

The party had to side-step the worms and keep on the move, hitting them when they could but without becoming cornered. Coins placed in slots on the wall gave access to areas with better weapons, and slowly but surely the worms would be defeated. The party was then able to do a little more exploration. Armour and



CSB was similar in appearance to the original DM, but the new quest was far less linear

other useful items were also found in the immediate area, allowing the party to 'tool up'. Unfortunately, the respite was short-lived, and the party would soon be battling with more creatures, and areas with dozens of pits that would appear and disappear on a whim.

Each of the four Corbums were located along a different 'way' in the dungeon, focusing on each of the four different skills – fighter (Ku), ninja (Ros), wizard (Dain) and priest (Neta). The Junction of the Ways forced the player to decide which 'way' to attempt first. Each one started at the junction, but then led the party to different dungeon levels. They would then meet up halfway through (at the Diabolical Demon Director) and then separate again, only to finally re-converge at the Fulya pit.

More often that not, the solution to an obstacle or trap would be based around the abilities associated with the 'way'. For instance, a problem encountered along the way of Dain would require spell casting. Sometimes, the party would get so far down one 'way', only to then have to retrace their steps back to the junction and try another way in order to retrieve an item they needed to make progress. Each 'way' required a special key to be located mid-way through before you could reach the Corbum.

Late arrival

CSB was released in late November 1989 for the Atari ST, some two years after the release of DM and about six months later than originally planned. In Europe, Mirrorsoft didn't get to see the game at all before it appeared on the shelves. Initially, it was difficult to get hold of, as only limited numbers had been shipped over from the US. Even Mirrorsoft staff had to go out and buy their own copies of the game to be able to play it! An Amiga version appeared in early 1990, with an improved animated introduction and music. For reasons unknown outside of FTL, an official PC conversion of CSB never appeared.

Many players found CSB to be a much harder game than DM. The confusing levels, the tougher monsters and the non-linear approach made it a frustrating experience. It also didn't look very different, except for the smattering of new monsters (including the blue Antmen, Rives, Hellhounds, Black Flames, Zytas and Deth Knights), but those who battled their way through also found it to be a rewarding and worthy update to DM, if not a proper full-blown sequel.

Mirrorsoft's demise at the end of 1991 forced FTL to find a new distributor for DM and CSB in Europe. It eventually signed up with Liverpool publisher and developer Psygnosis, who re-released a special edition of DM for the Amiga (which included CSB) in 1992, along with a re-release of the PC version minus the FTL Sound Adaptor (which was no longer required, as soundcards were becoming a standard piece of PC hardware by then).

The legend lives on

By the early 1990s, FTL's staff numbers had grown, yet most of its efforts had been dominated by converting DM and CSB to as many different formats as it could. The company had originally planned to release a series of DM-style games in different genres, with horror and science-fiction title being considered. Ultimately, none of them ever went beyond the drawing board.

Instead, FTL eventually turned its attentions to producing a proper, standalone sequel to DM. Dungeon Master 2: The Legend of Skullkeep was initially released for the Sega Mega-CD in 1994, and was followed by versions for the IBM PC, Amiga, Macintosh, PC9801, PC9821 and the FM Towns the following year. By then, the Atari ST had disappeared off the gaming radar, so no ST version was produced.

This time around, FTL developed the game for US publisher Interplay to publish worldwide, thereby freeing FTL to concentrate on producing the game itself rather than having to deal with publishing concerns like commissioning the artwork, the boxes, distribution, and so on.

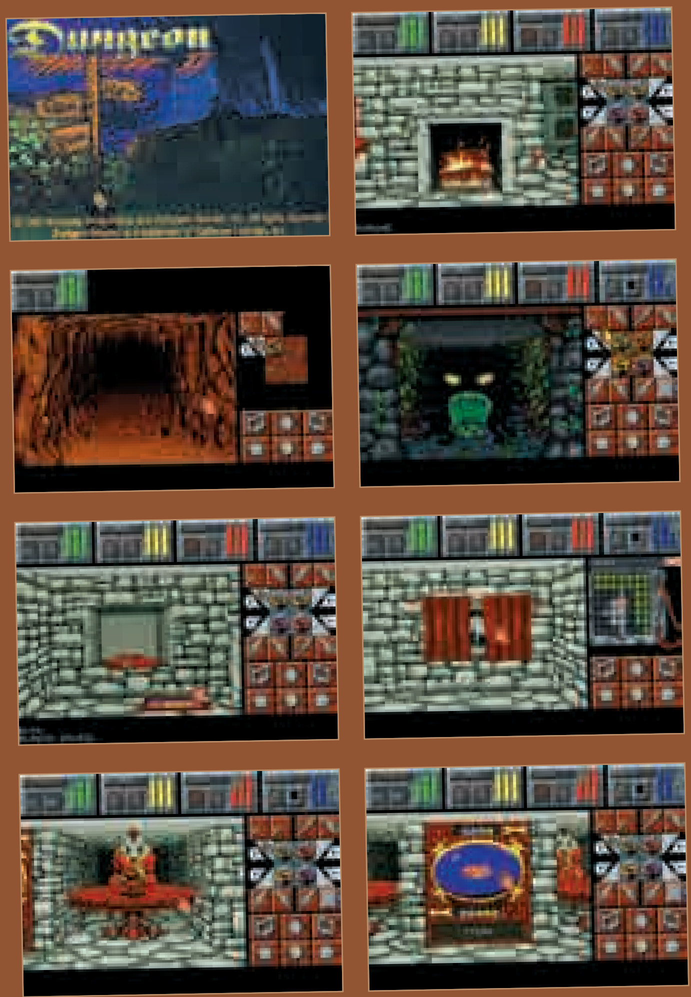
The PC, Amiga and Macintosh versions of DM2 used 256 colour graphics, whilst the remaining versions used a mixture of graphics from the original DM (mainly objects and the various inventory and status screens) and the newly produced location and interface graphics. Once again, DM veterans Wayne Holder, Doug Bell and Andy Jaros worked on the sequel, along with other new recruits and staff from Interplay.

The game system for DM2 was the same as the original, except for some small additions. The spell-casting interface was improved, providing colourful icons above each rune to give some clue as to their use. The control cluster was the same, but it had a few extras of its own, including being able to turn individual party members manually. There was much more interaction with the scenery in DM2. Freed from the same grey dungeon walls of DM and CSB, DM2 let the player explore inside and outside of buildings, and journey through underground passages as well as traverse dungeons as before. There was more animation too, including driving rain in some of the outdoor locations, fluttering window curtains and flickering fires.

This time furniture could be moved around, log fireplaces could be set alight, shops allowed players to buy and sell items, and a useful 'magick map' meant that mapping wasn't quite as difficult as it once was. In fact, the map was located immediately above



The sequel debuted on the Sega Mega-CD, with home-computer versions appearing courtesy of Interplay



Despite slightly improved visuals, the sequel didn't really move the series forward

where the game started. When used, it showed a small grid (7x7) of the surrounding area.

Final fight

DM2's ultimate quest was to prevent General Dragroth's minions from creating a ZO gate that would allow him to leave the void between worlds and enter the castle of Skullkeep. The player had to build a ZO-link machine to reach and defeat Dragroth, before he did the same to them. Whilst it sounded simple enough, the game had no less than 23 different levels to explore and a whole host of new monsters to exchange blows with.

As with the original games, DM2 featured a Hall of Champions at the start. The lead character (Zed Torham) was already chosen, so the player had three other champions to resurrect or re-incarnate. These were all new characters, with no chance to import previous champions from the earlier games.

Like CSB before it, DM2 was a tough game to get to grips with. The initial monsters that the player encountered were difficult to defeat, and despite the additions, the 256 colour graphics hadn't moved on enough from the original game. In particular, the dark and rainy outdoor locations were a bit murky and it was often difficult to see what was going on.

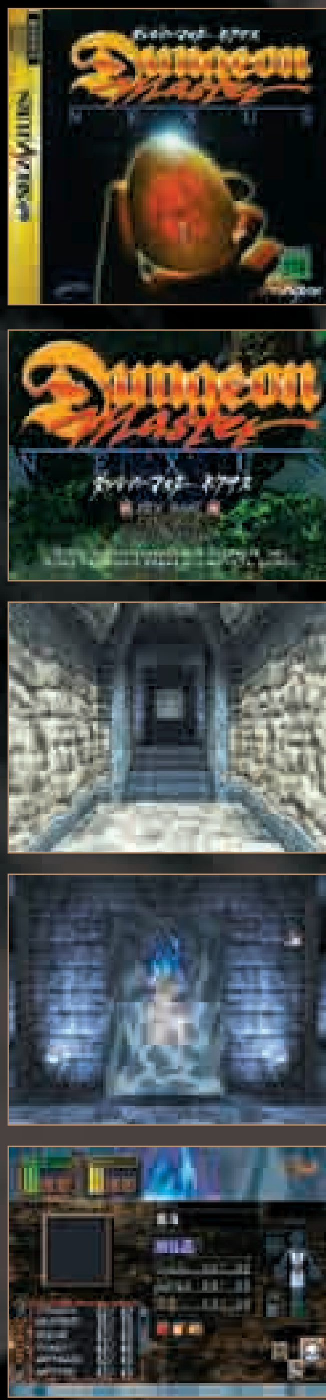
Despite wanting to like the new sequel, many felt that DM2 was stuck in the past. It was unfortunate, but it probably suffered from being released a few years too late. The gaming world had moved on since the original release of DM seven years before. Some of the games published by other developers since DM had improved upon its style, whilst others had taken the next step and gone to actual 3D – Origin's Ultima Underworld springs to mind.

The door closes?

DM eventually followed the true-3D route in 1998, with the release of Dungeon Master Nexus on the Japanese Sega Saturn. This exclusive version of DM was effectively a new game which included a proper 3D engine and a new 15-level dungeon to explore. However, FTL Games had all but disappeared by this point. Doug Bell and Wayne Holder collaborated on the book Java Game Programming for Dummies in the same year, and various other FTL employees went on to teach IT and Computer Science at the University of California in San Diego.

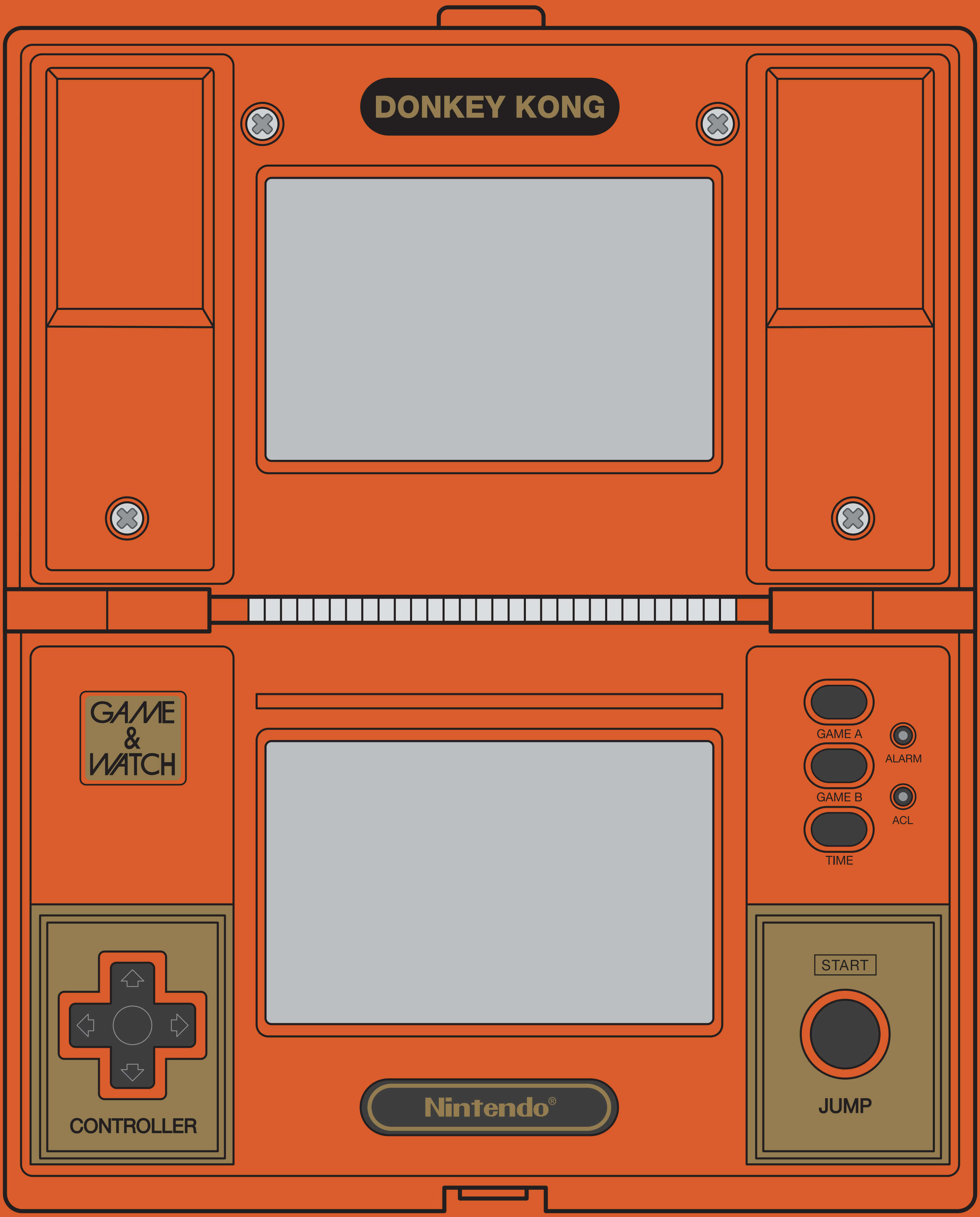
DM left a lasting impression on the gaming world. There is a thriving online community of people today who are willing to discuss what DM was and what it meant to them back in the 16-bit days. Many programmers have taken up the challenge to produce modern, updated versions of DM, many using modern 3D engines. Somehow, somewhere, Chaos will return.

Thanks must go to Christophe Fontanel and artist David Darrow for their help in compiling this article. RG*



Dungeon Master made its final official appearance on the ill-fated Sega Saturn

eMag


DONKEY KONG
GAME & WATCH
GAME A
ALARM
GAME B
ACL
TIME
START
JUMP
CONTROLLER
Nintendo®

GAME & WATCH™ MULTI SCREEN

>Watch A Go Go

Back in 1980, before the GameBoy was even a glint in Gunpei Yokoi's eye, Nintendo released the first of its Game & Watch series. 60 titles were released in total, and they're now highly coveted by retro collectors. Jules Burt looks at the history of these desirable handhelds and provides an up-to-date price guide for your reference

The late 1970s saw the introduction of a wide variety of handheld games being produced by most of the major toy manufacturers. The arcade craze was just starting with Space Invaders, Defender and Asteroids eating holes in every kid's pocket. Toy firms were desperate to cash in on this new market and were soon producing scaled-down versions of all the popular arcade hits.

Nintendo saw what was happening in the US and decided that it was ideally suited to this type of product. For two years the Japanese developer had been developing a new liquid crystal display, invented by one of its research scientists, Gunpei Yokoi. Nintendo now had to turn his invention into a top-selling children's game.

Handheld history

Gunpei Yokoi joined Nintendo in 1965, around the time its executives decided to branch out and fund a research and development department to come up with new ideas and technologies. Yokoi was 24, and already something of an electronics wizard, having spent most of his youth tinkering with portable radios and electronics kits. He was made head of Nintendo's first research and development team, RD1, and was tasked to design new toys for the company to market.

He began by working on an extension to a Nintendo's Ultra Toys project. Yokoi and his team developed the Ultra Hand, a robotic arm with a gripping action which could be controlled using a mini joystick. Although not a success, the work on the Ultra Toys line led the team into miniature electronics, and in the early 70s the first liquid crystal screen was developed. It seems



Gunpei Yokoi, designer of the Game & Watch series, the GameBoy, and the somewhat less successful VirtualBoy

there were several problems in development as the invention was not patented until 1977.

The following year, with most of the problems resolved, the idea for the Game & Watch was born. The name was derived from the fact that there was a small digital clock (later with an accompanying alarm) built into every game. It took a



Ball, the first Game & Watch title, seen here with packaging and Japanese flyer

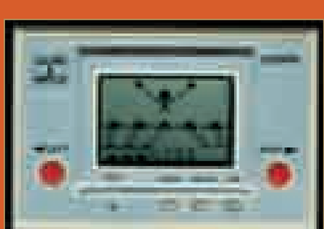
further two years before the first title hit the shops. Ball went on sale in April 1980, around the same time as the Donkey Kong arcade game was beginning to gain popularity. Ball was followed by Flagman, but these early efforts were rather lacklustre and did not sell in great numbers. It wasn't until the release of Fire in July 1980 that the games really started to get noticed.

>G&W formats

With 10 different formats released, collecting Game & Watch can be confusing to say the least. Many of the more popular games and the licensed titles, such as Popeye, Snoopy and Donkey Kong Jr., were released on more than one format. Here's a summary of all the various models:

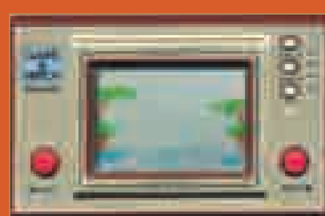
Silver

The first five games were a bit primitive in comparison to the later models. They have a single screen which has a silver-coloured border with the name of the game in the top-right corner. The screens have a painted overlay. The titles in the series are Ball, Flagman, Vermin, Fire and Judge.



Gold

Same size and design as the Silver range except that these have a gold-coloured border. They also introduce a small metal foldaway stand on the back of the game. Titles in the Gold range are Manhole, Helmet and Lion.



Wide Screen

This format continues the basic design of the Gold releases except that the single screen is now a little larger. They carry a small picture on the left of the game with the name on the right. Different-coloured plastic backs make this range stand out. There are 10 titles: Parachute, Octopus, Popeye, Chef, Mickey Mouse, Egg, Fire, Turtle Bridge, Fire Attack and Snoopy Tennis.



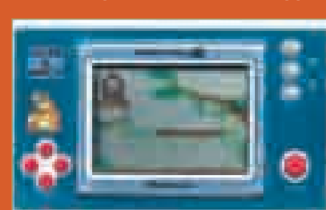
Multi Screen

The first big change in format and a very popular one. An additional screen doubles the gameplay for twice the fun. They come in two different formats. The first has two widescreen-size screens on top of each other. The second format opens like a book and is played with the two screens side by side. The games are housed in a bulky plastic case. The front of the case has a large metallic fascia, some with a colour graphic and the game's name. The titles are Oil Panic, Donkey Kong, Mickey & Donald, Greenhouse, Donkey Kong II, Mario Bros., Rainshower, Lifeboat, Pinball, Blackjack, Squish, Bombsweeper, Safebuster, Goldcliff and Zelda.



New Wide

The same style and size of a regular Wide Screen game except that these have a coloured metallic border. There are eight games in this range: Donkey Kong Jr., Mario's Cement Factory, Manhole, Tropical Fish, Super Mario Bros., Climber, Balloon Fight and Mario the Juggler.



Double trouble

Subsequent releases capitalised on the more popular features of the earlier games and they just got better and better. With the release of the first Multi Screen Game & Watch in May 1982, Oil Panic, players were treated to two screens of gameplay. The second Multi Screen game, Donkey Kong, introduced Nintendo's famous cross-shaped directional pad which later graced the NES controller and GameBoy. Donkey Kong was also the company's first million-selling title – a very impressive feat in less than two years. It was to repeat this success another three times in the next seven years with Donkey Kong II, Snoopy Tennis and the famous Mario Bros.

Constant improvements were implemented as new technology advanced throughout the 1980s. The screens were made a little larger and the games became ever more complex. The big breakthrough came in 1983 with



The Multi Screen series – an obvious inspiration for Nintendo's new dual-screen DS handheld

the introduction of the full-colour Panorama series. These excellent games lifted the Game & Watch series to new heights, but Nintendo continued releasing games in the original formats to be sold alongside their more advanced cousins.

The series eventually ran to 10 different formats but it's the widescreen and mulitscreen releases that are best remembered. All told, Nintendo sold over 12 million Game & Watches around the world in 11 years. The last release, 1991's Mario The Juggler, was a tribute to the very first game, Ball. It featured the company's best-known character, Mario, juggling balls just like the stickman in the original. Eventually, Game & Watch production slowed to make way for Nintendo's next, more advanced handheld system, the GameBoy. Also created by Gumpei Yokoi, the GameBoy has proved to be Nintendo's biggest hit yet, but its roots are in the Game & Watch.

Nintendo certainly hasn't forgotten its past glories. Five Game & Watch Galleries have been released for the GameBoy, and each collection features several original Game & Watch titles plus updated versions with full-colour graphics and familiar Nintendo characters. Also, a range of small keyring-sized Mini Classics have been released since September 1998. While not strictly part of the official range, they are still of interest to collectors. A Game & Watch has even turned up in the Nintendo's recent GameCube game Pikmin 2. You have to direct your Pikmin army to pick up the game and move it to a safer location. Very sensible, especially when you consider that the cases scratch easily...



A throwback to the first Game & Watch title, Mario the Juggler ended the series on a high

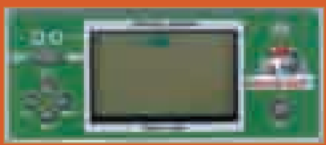
Micro Vs. System

By far the most elegant games designed for the series, with a superb build quality that feels good in the hand. They consist of a single screen about the size of two Wide Screen games side by side. They have a pair of controllers, which fit snugly into the sides of the game when not in use. These are the only games designed with two players in mind, and include Boxing, Donkey Kong 3 and Donkey Kong Hockey.



Crystal Screen

The same-size screen as a standard Wide Screen model, except that the screen is completely see-through and the game itself is much wider. It has glass on both sides and didn't allow any permanent graphics or painted screen overlay. The games are Super Mario Bros., Climber and Balloon Fight, and all three were later released as New Wide games.



Tabletop

These games are much larger than the rest of the series and were designed for playing on a tabletop. The best thing about them is the introduction of colour to the series. The large screen is reflected via a mirror onto the playing area, creating sharp colour graphics. It takes a while to get used to the proper joystick and buttons but these are an excellent addition to the series. The range features Donkey Kong Jr., Mario's Cement Factory, Snoopy and Popeye.



Panorama

These are smaller versions of the tabletop machines, except that you pull the screen up to reveal the playing area. These are also in colour and are amongst the best looking of all the games. There are six titles in total: Snoopy, Popeye, Donkey Kong Jr., Mario's Bombs Away, Mickey Mouse and Donkey Kong Circus.



Super Color

These are taller machines, which come with a painted overlay. They look like a New Wide Screen game turned on its side. Only two Super Color games were ever released – Spitball Sparky and Crab Grab.



>Price guide

As with any collectable, games that are 100% complete and as near to factory condition as possible command the highest prices. It is worth remembering that most of these games are now over 20 years-old and the chances of finding one at a boot sale or charity shop have dropped dramatically over the last few years.

Boxed examples of any game are making decent money now. Even unboxed examples of the more common games are sought after and always sell. However, there are several games which are in plentiful supply to get you started and these can be picked up at a reasonable price on eBay. When pricing a game remember that it must have its serial number on the back together with the all important battery cover. These are easily lost and would affect the value by up to 50%. Also, if the screen or casing has any marks or scratches then the value will again decrease. It goes without saying that the game should still be working!

The following table lists all released Game & Watch games in chronological order, with model number (found on the game's plastic casing), series type and release date. There are two prices listed – for mint, loose, unboxed examples with no packaging, and for mint in mint box examples, with instructions and poly inner.

Game	Serial no.	Type	Release date	Loose value	Boxed value
Ball	AC-01	Silver	Apr-80	£70	£200
Flagman	FL-02	Silver	Jun-80	£150	£800
Vermin	MT-03	Silver	Jul-80	£50	£125
Fire	RC-04	Silver	Jul-80	£50	£125
Judge	IP-05	Silver	Oct-80	£125	£600
Manhole	MH-06	Gold	Jan-81	£30	£90
Helmet	CN-07	Gold	Feb-81	£30	£90
Lion	LN-08	Gold	Apr-81	£40	£120
Parachute	PR-21	Wide Screen	Jun-81	£20	£60
Octopus	OC-22	Wide Screen	Jul-81	£15	£50
Popeye	PP-23	Wide Screen	Aug-81	£20	£60
Chef	FP-24	Wide Screen	Sep-81	£30	£90
Mickey Mouse	MC-25	Wide Screen	Oct-81	£15	£50



Game	Serial no.	Type	Release date	Loose value	Boxed value
Egg	EG-26	Wide Screen	Oct-81	£100	£325
Fire	FR-27	Wide Screen	Dec-81	£20	£60
Turtle Bridge	TL-28	Wide Screen	Feb-82	£25	£100
Fire Attack	ID-29	Wide Screen	Mar-82	£25	£100
Snoopy Tennis	SP-30	Wide Screen	Apr-82	£15	£50
Oil Panic	OP-51	Multi Screen	May-82	£30	£90
Donkey Kong	DK-52	Multi Screen	Jun-82	£30	£90
Donkey Kong Jr.	DJ-101	New Wide	Oct-82	£15	£50
Mickey & Donald	DM-53	Multi Screen	Nov-82	£20	£45
Greenhouse	GH-54	Multi Screen	Dec-82	£20	£45
Donkey Kong II	JR-55	Multi Screen	Mar-83	£25	£80
Mario Bros.	MW-56	Multi Screen	Mar-83	£25	£70
Donkey Kong Jr.	CJ-71	Tabletop	Apr-83	£35	£100
Mario's Cement Factory	CM-72	Tabletop	Apr-83	£35	£100



Game	Serial no.	Type	Release date	Loose value	Boxed value
Mario's Cement Factory	ML-102	New Wide	Jun-83	£15	£50
Snoopy	SM-73	Tabletop	Jul-83	£45	£130
Manhole	NH-103	New Wide	Aug-83	£20	£50
Snoopy	SM-91	Panorama	Aug-83	£40	£100
Popeye	PG-92	Panorama	Aug-83	£40	£100
Rainshower	LP-57	Multi Screen	Aug-83	£75	£250
Popeye	PG-74	Tabletop	Aug-83	£75	£350
Donkey Kong Jr.	CJ-93	Panorama	Oct-83	£80	£300
Lifeboat	TC-58	Multi Screen	Oct-83	£25	£70
Mario's Bombs Away	PB-94	Panorama	Nov-83	£80	£300
Pinball	PB-59	Multi Screen	Dec-83	£15	£35
Spitball Sparky	BU-201	Super Color	Feb-84	£25	£50
Crab Grab	UD-202	Super Color	Feb-84	£30	£60
Mickey Mouse	DC-95	Panorama	Feb-84	£80	£300
Boxing	BX-301	Micro Vs.	Jul-84	£20	£40
Donkey Kong 3	AK-302	Micro Vs.	Aug-84	£20	£40
Donkey Kong Circus	MK-96	Panorama	Sep-84	£80	£300
Donkey Kong Hockey	HK-303	Micro Vs.	Nov-84	£20	£40



Game	Serial no.	Type	Release date	Loose value	Boxed value
Blackjack	BJ-60	Multi Screen	Feb-85	£15	£30
Tropical Fish	TF-104	New Wide	Jul-85	£20	£50
Squish	MG-61	Multi Screen	Apr-86	£20	£50
Super Mario Bros.	YM-801	Crystal	Jun-86	£125	£300
Climber	DR-802	Crystal	Jul-86	£80	£200
Balloon Flight	BF-803	Crystal	Nov-86	£125	£300
Bombsweeper	BD-62	Multi Screen	Jun-87	£30	£70
Safebuster	JB-63	Multi Screen	Jan-88	£20	£50
Super Mario Bros.	YM-105	New Wide	Mar-88	£15	£35
Climber	DR-106	New Wide	Mar-88	£20	£50
Balloon Flight	BF-107	New Wide	Mar-88	£20	£50
Goldcliff	MV-64	Multi Screen	Oct-88	£20	£50
Tetris Jr.	N/A	Multi Screen	N/A	N/A	N/A
Zelda	ZL-65	Multi Screen	Aug-89	£25	£60
Mario The Juggler	MJ-108	New Wide	Oct-91	£100	£250



Mego released Fire as Fireman, Fireman. Note the redesigned packaging with Time Out breanding

Variations and rarities

If you cannot find the game you have in our price guide, chances are you own a variation, possibly from a different country or even a different manufacturer.

Let's start with the Mego/Time Out variations. These games were only released in the USA and are variations on the original Silver series. Mego, a major toy manufacturer of the era (World's Greatest Superheroes, Planet Of The Apes, Star Trek etc), had a superb distribution setup throughout US toyshops. Nintendo, who at this time was only just entering the market, realised that this was a great way to get its games some wider exposure outside of the usual electrical retailers. Time Out was an electronic division of Mego used for all the new electronic games.

Telling the versions apart isn't too hard. They all have the same colour plastic casing and the games play exactly the same, but the branding and sometimes the game's name is different. Ball (AC-01) was released as Toss-Up, Vermin (MT-03) as The Exterminator, and Fire (RC-04) as Fireman, Fireman. Flagman (FL-02) and Judge (IP-05) retained their original names, although the boxes obviously featured a Mego and Time Out logo. These variations sell for about the same as the regular Nintendo releases – a little more for the boxed examples which are very tough to find.

Also in the Silver series is a variation on Judge (IP-05). The plastic casing can be either green or purple in colour, but the serial number doesn't change and they're worth about the same.

The next variation concerns the Gold series game Helmet (CN-07). When this game was released in the UK, through the CGL (Computer Games Ltd) brand, it was renamed Headache. The box and the game itself all bear the new name, but the instruction booklet is the normal Helmet version. This is amongst the hardest of all boxed games to find, and a near-mint boxed example sold on eBay recently for an amazing £1,600. A mint loose example will set you back about £200.



Perhaps CGL thought a game called Helmet would raise a few eyebrows in the UK



Same game, different name. Boxing became Punch-Out!! in the US

Arcade at home

Onto the Tabletop series now. The very first game in this series – Donkey Kong Jr. (CJ-71) – was also released in the USA by Coleco. By this time, Coleco had already established itself in the market with its range of superb shrunk-down mini-arcade games (Pac-Man, Galaxian, Zaxxon, Frogger etc). It seemed only sensible for Coleco to re-badge the existing Nintendo game, add some new side art graphics and release the title itself as part of its arcade series.

An interesting variation on the Super Colour game, Spitball Sparky (BU-201), has also surfaced. An example has been found, in the UK, with an all-white casing instead of the usual shiny silver. This is probably a prototype or a first-run manufacturers test-shot. Whatever its history, these are obviously incredibly rare and hardly ever turn up.

Yet another variation is the Micro Vs. System game Boxing (BX-301), or in this guise, Punch-Out!! This is once again a simple name change, used to tie-in to the popular NES game. This version appears to have only been available to buy on a plastic blister card.

These blister cards were distributed by Micro Games Of America and so far 16 different games have surfaced. The full list is as follows: Balloon Flight, Mario's Cement Factory, Blackjack, Zelda, Bombsweeper, Climber, Donkey Kong, Goldcliff, Mario Bros., Donkey King Jr., Super Mario Bros., Donkey Kong II, Punch-Out, Donkey Kong Hockey, Donkey Kong 3, and Mario The Juggler.

As for the multiscreen Tetris Jr. game listed in the price guide – this was never released, and it's thought that Nintendo didn't want to impact on sales of GameBoy Tetris. Rumours abound that units were actually produced and stored in a warehouse, but one has yet to surface. The game did finally get released as part of the Mini Classic range.

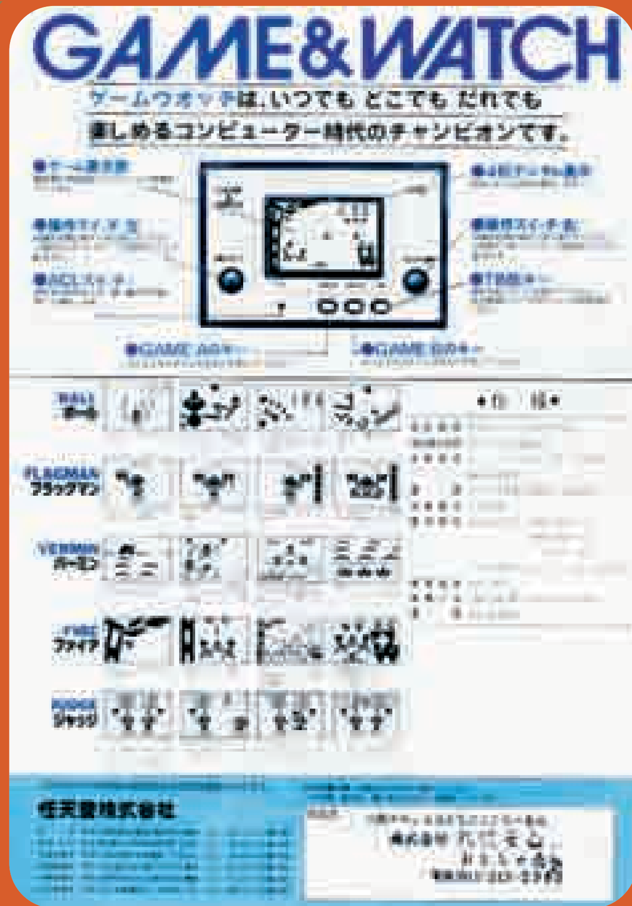
Lastly, a version of Super Mario Bros. (YM-105) was released as a competition prize in Japan. It's basically the normal New Wide version of the game, housed in a plastic shell which represents a Japanese comic character. These were once considered very rare, but around 10,000 were made and they do turn up quite often. They do have a unique serial number of YM-901, however, and sell for upwards of £300. RG*



The special edition of Super Mario Bros. came housed in a unique plastic case

Silver Series flyer (front and back)









Widescreen Series flyer (left and right)

Donkey Kong/Oil Panic flyer (front and back)





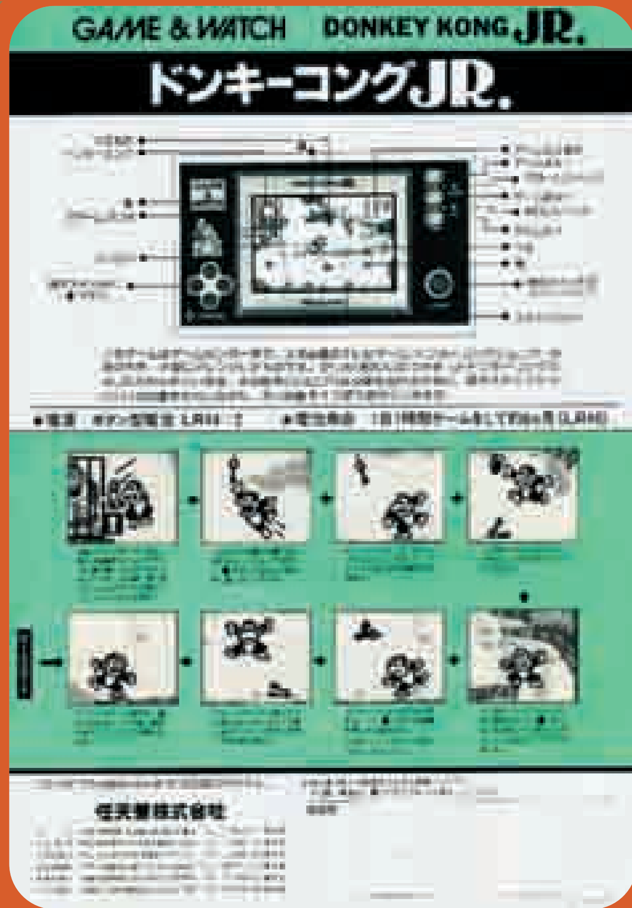




Mickey & Donald/Greenhouse flyer (front and back)

Donkey Kong Jr flyer (front and back)









Donkey Kong Jr/Mario's Cement Factory flyer (front and back)

Donkey Kong II/Mario Bros flyer (front and back)









Panorama Series flyer (front and back)

Tabletop flyer (front and back)









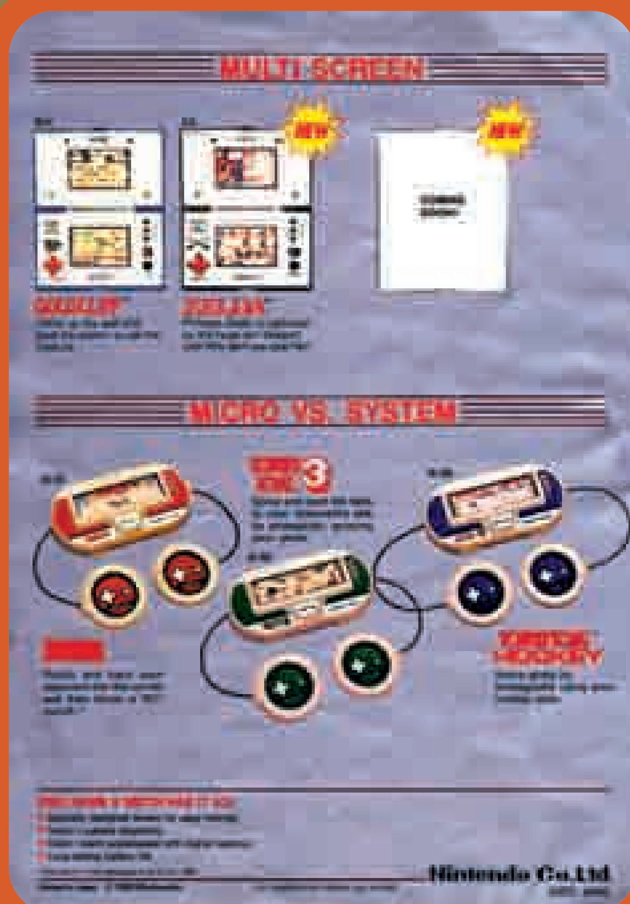
SuperColor Series flyer (front and back)

Game & Watch brochure (pages 1 and 2)









Game & Watch brochure (pages 3 and 4)

Retro Coverdisc

The 10th Retro Gamer coverdisc features 50 of the latest retro games, including faithful PC remakes of such classic titles as Space Invaders, Bomberman and Tetris. And once you've played the games, why not try your hand at making your own? We've secured the complete Home Version of The Games Factory for inclusion on the coverdisc, and a 'getting started' guide to using the program begins on page 98



step 1 Place the coverdisc into your CD/DVD drive and it should start automatically. If not, select Run from the Start menu and enter D:\browser.exe (assuming that D: is the letter of your CD/DVD drive). When the browser appears, click OK to accept the declaration.



step 2 Some games/programs are provided as .exe files and these will run or install straight from the disc. If the program chooses to install itself, simply follow the onscreen prompts and then wait while the files are copied to your hard drive.



step 3 Many games/programs are stored in .zip files, so you might need an archive manager like WinZip, which is under the Utilities browser tab. Extract all the files from the .zip archive using the Extract feature and place them in an empty folder, then run the .exe file.



step 4 If you are looking for a particular program, click the Search button and enter a keyword. The browser program will search the disc and place all the relevant results under the left-most browser tab. They can now be accessed directly from here.

Problem solving

If you're having a problem with a particular program on our coverdisc, please view the help file in the program for assistance. You might also consider visiting the website of the program author for further help. If this fails, please email: *techsupport@livepublishing.co.uk.*

If you are having problems with the CD, first check that it is not dirty or scratched. CDs can be cleaned by holding them under the cold water tap and gently rubbing the silver side with a tissue. Dry it carefully with another tissue.

If the disc still doesn't work, then it may be faulty. Faulty discs should be returned to Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Ltd, Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, UK, SK10 4NP. We will replace all genuinely faulty discs.

Coverdisc helpline

01625 855 051

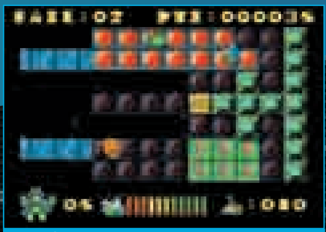
techsupport@livepublishing.co.uk

(Monday-Friday 10am-4pm)

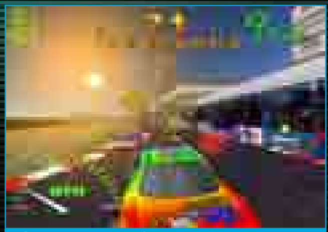
Helpline for coverdisc problems only

DISCLAIMER

Some of the programs on the Retro Gamer disc interact with your PC on a fundamental level. We strongly advise you back up your personal data before using the disc. Due to the way the Retro Gamer disc is compiled, Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Limited and/or any associated company and/or individual cannot take responsibility for damage to your PC or otherwise arising from use of the coverdisc. You use the programs on the disc at your own risk.


Humphrey


The Void


Victory Road


Bugs

PC Retro Games

Utility Name	File Name	File Size	Type	Notes	Description
AirStrike 3D: Operation WAT	as3d_demo.exe	8,162Kb	Shareware	Trial	A great helicopter flight-sim/shoot-em-up from DivoGames
AirXonix	AirXonix.exe	2,299Kb	Shareware	Trial	AxySoft's take on the classic Qix featuring 3D graphics
Alien Shooter	AlienShooterDemo.exe	6,049Kb	Shareware	Trial	A great isometric shoot-em-up from the Sigma Team
Alien Sky	AlienSkySetup.exe	6,904Kb	Shareware	Trial	An arcade shoot-em-up in the style of Space Invaders
Aqua Bubble	AquaBubbleSetup.exe	4,277Kb	Shareware	Trial	An excellent Puzzle Bobble variant game for Windows
Arkanoid 4000	Arkanoid4000.exe	4,467Kb	Shareware	Trial	Arkanoid brought bang up to date by Alawar Entertainment
Atomaders	AtomadersSetup.exe	8,428Kb	Shareware	Trial	A good-looking Space Invader clone for Windows
AxySnake	AxySnake.exe	4,774Kb	Shareware	Trial	Guide the hungry snake around the garden avoiding hazards
Beetle Ju	BeetleJu.exe	5,757Kb	Shareware	Trial	A Boulderdash clone with elements of Bomberman thrownin
Bombardix	Bombardix.exe	4,206Kb	Shareware	Trial	Another Bomberman clone with five worlds to work through
Bubble Splash	bubble_splash.exe	3,311Kb	Shareware	Trial	Bubble Splash mixes puzzle elements with explosive action
Bugatron	BugatronSetup.exe	4,544Kb	Shareware	Trial	A Galaga clone, marrying 80s gameplay with 3D graphics
Bugs	bugs.zip	2,785Kb	Freeware	None	A colourful update of the classic Bombjack arcade game
Centipede 25	CentipedeDX25.zip	242Kb	Freeware	None	An extremely faithful remake of the classic Atari coin-op
Chompa	chompa.zip	881Kb	Freeware	None	A great Pac-Man remake
Clash	Clash.exe	4,812Kb	Shareware	Trial	Bash those bricks in this remake of the old bat and ball game
Crimsonland	CrimsonlandSetup.exe	6,898Kb	Shareware	Trial	Destroy your alien foe in this classic top-down shooter
Discovera	discovera.exe	3,192Kb	Shareware	Trial	Another good Qix game for Windows
Docker Sokoban	DockerSetup.exe	3,914Kb	Shareware	Trial	Move the stock around the rooms in this great puzzler
Double Digger	DiggerSetup.exe	5,736Kb	Shareware	Trial	An inspired Emerald Mines remake
Fly or Die: GemJam Gold	GemJamGoldInstall.exe	3,098Kb	Shareware	Trial	Another great Boulderdash clone to get stuck into
Freak Bank	Freakbank.zip	8,065Kb	Freeware	None	A remake of West Bank featuring gore galore. Lots of fun
Gold Sprinter	GoldSprinterSetup.exe	5,540Kb	Shareware	Trial	Collect the gold in this platform and ladders game
Humphrey	humphrey.zip	2,686Kb	Freeware	None	A brand new Spectrum remake by the Retrospec team
Ice Age	IceAgeSetup.exe	2,787Kb	Shareware	Trial	A simple but fun Puzzle Bobble clone for Windows
Jezzball Ultimate	jezzball-ultimate.exe	5,287Kb	Shareware	Trial	Build up the picture by hitting the moving balls
Krakout	krakout.exe	3,643Kb	Shareware	Trial	The old 8-bit game Krakout brought back to life
Kung Fu Master Returns	kfmr09.zip	1,303Kb	Freeware	None	A remake of Irem's classic beat-em-up Kung Fu Master
Leaf Buster	leaf_buster.exe	5,484Kb	Shareware	Trial	Clear the screen by matching the coloured leafs
Lode Doomer	lode.exe	2,369Kb	Shareware	Trial	A Lode Runner clone for your PC
Magic Ball	MagicBall.exe	3,108Kb	Shareware	Trial	An interesting Arkanoid clone with 3D graphics
PacBomber	pacbomber.exe	1,859Kb	Shareware	Trial	Pac-Man meets Bomberman in this great maze game
PacBoy	pacboy.exe	1,704Kb	Shareware	Trial	A great Pac-Man-inspired remake for your PC
Penguin Command	penguin-command.exe	1,383Kb	Freeware	None	One of the best Missile Command remakes around
Pong	Pong.exe	1,921Kb	Freeware	None	Pong update featuring cool-looking particle effects
QuadroNoid	qnoid.exe	2,223Kb	Shareware	Trial	Classic 2D Arkanoid clone
Ricochet	RicochetSetup.exe	7,478Kb	Shareware	Trial	Another Breakout clone for your PC
Ricochet Lost Worlds	RicochetLostWorldsSetup.exe	13,218Kb	Shareware	Trial	A great Breakout clone for all Windows systems
Rock EGG	rockEGG.zip	5,358Kb	Freeware	None	A faithful Boulderdash clone with cute graphics
RotoBlox	RotoBloxSetup.exe	5,299Kb	Shareware	Trial	An impressive Tetris remake with great graphics
Space Pong	SpacePong.zip	430Kb	Freeware	None	You can't really have enough Pong remakes!
Star Defender	stardef.exe	3,490Kb	Shareware	Trial	Classic top-down shooting action, similar to Galaga
Super Collapse II	Collapse2Setup.exe	3,275Kb	Shareware	Trial	Collapse the cubes to clear the screen
Swarm	SwarmSetup.exe	9,156Kb	Shareware	Trial	A modern take on the classic Asteroids
The Void	The Void.exe	2,520Kb	Freeware	None	A Space Invaders remake with great graphics
Tiny Cars	tinycars.exe	8,736Kb	Shareware	Trial	A fast and fun Micro Machines clone for Windows
Tiny Cars II	tinycars2.exe	9,949Kb	Shareware	Trial	A fun sequel with a multi-player mode
Transcend	Transcend_0.2-IGF-2_Windows.exe	913Kb	Freeware	None	A unique 2D shooter with a strong retro feel
Universal Hero	Universal Hero V1_1.zip	4,012Kb	Freeware	None	A remake of the old Mastertronic budget game
Victory Road	SetupVictoryRoad.msi	32,680Kb	Freeware	None	An impressive remake of Daytona USA

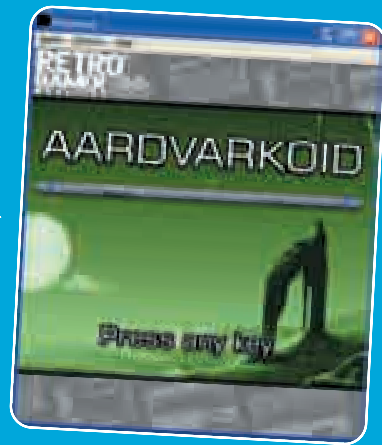
The Games Factory

Utility Name	File Name	File Size	Type	Notes	Description
The Games Factory	GFHomeRG.exe	50,515Kb	Full version	None	The complete Home Version of The Games Factory
User Manual	TGFmanual.pdf	1,993Kb	n/a	n/a	The Games Factory user manual in PDF format
User Manual Example Files	manualtutorials.zip	14,519Kb	n/a	n/a	The files for following along with the tutorials
Tutorial Source Files	source.zip	391Kb	n/a	n/a	Sound and graphic files required to follow the step-by-step guide

Clickteam Demos

Utility Name	File Name	File Size	Type	Notes	Description
Install Creator	icinst.exe	2,375Kb	Freeware	Ad screen	Create installers for commercial and non-commercial products
Install Creator Pro	icpinst.exe	2,870Kb	Demo	30-day trial	The Pro version of Install Creator
Jamagic	JamagicDemo.exe	22,786Kb	Demo	30-day trial	Develop 3D games and powerful 2D applications
Multimedia Fusion	MMFDemo.exe	17,353Kb	Demo	30-day trial	Develop applications, demos and 2D games with ease
Patch Maker	PMUS12r.exe	476Kb	Freeware	Ad screen	Quickly and easily create update patches for your programs

>The Games Factory user guide



On this month's coverdisc you'll find the full version of The Games Factory Home Edition. It's not limited or crippled in any way – every feature is available and you can use it indefinitely. The complete PDF user manual is included on the CD, and lots of additional information can be found at **www.clickteam.com**, but if you've never used the program before, this step-by-step guide to getting started will help you create your very first game.

The Games Factory has a number of editor windows, but the three most important for the purposes of this guide are the Storyboard Editor, the Level Editor and the Event Editor – all of which can be accessed from the menus or the toolbar. What we will create is not unlike Arkanoid, the classic bat and ball game.

The sound and graphic files you need to follow the guide are included on the coverdisc (source.zip), along with a version of the completed game which features many enhancements. Begin by unzipping the contents of this archive into an empty folder on your desktop. You can now install The Games Factory and start to follow the steps.

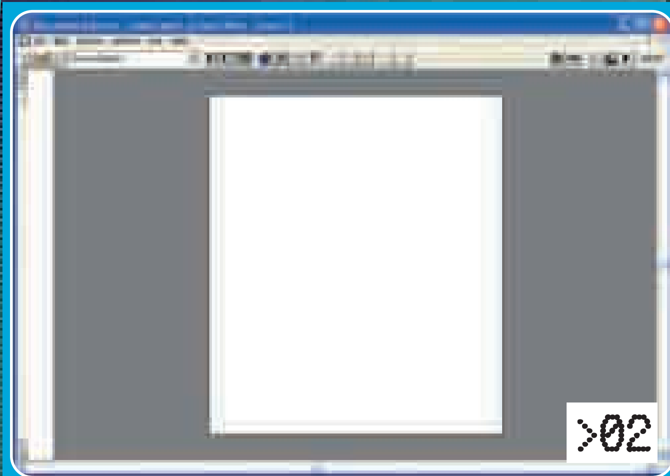
Serial Number

During installation of The Games Factory you will need to enter the following code:

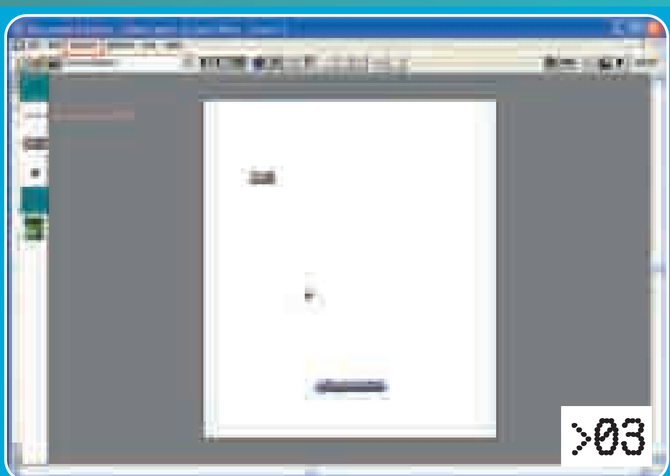
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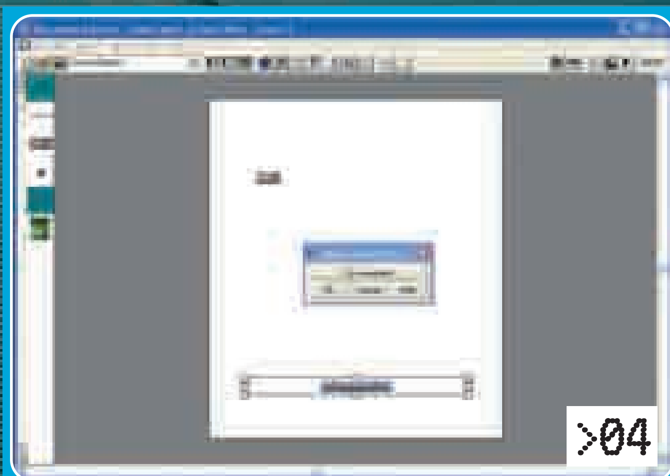
Once installation is complete, launch The Games Factory by double-clicking the Desktop icon. The first thing you need to do is create a new level by selecting New from the File menu. We will use a custom size of 400 by 480 for our bat and ball game, so enter these values in the edit boxes and click OK.



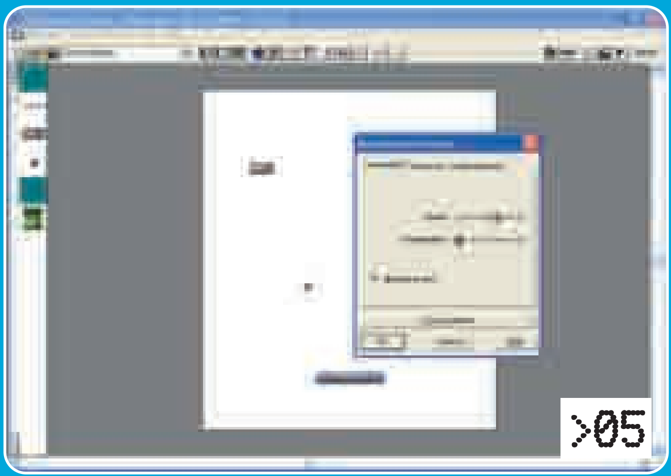
The first screen you see is the Storyboard Editor. This shows what levels or screens you have in the game. Currently there is just the one screen. Click on the button labelled '1' to go to the Level Editor for level 1. This is where we will set up the game.



For convenience, the graphics for the game have already been created. Bring them into the level by selecting Objects/ Pick Objects From A Game on the menu and choose the sprites.gam file. The graphics will appear in the Object Shelf to the left. Drag a bat, brick and chrome ball object into the level.



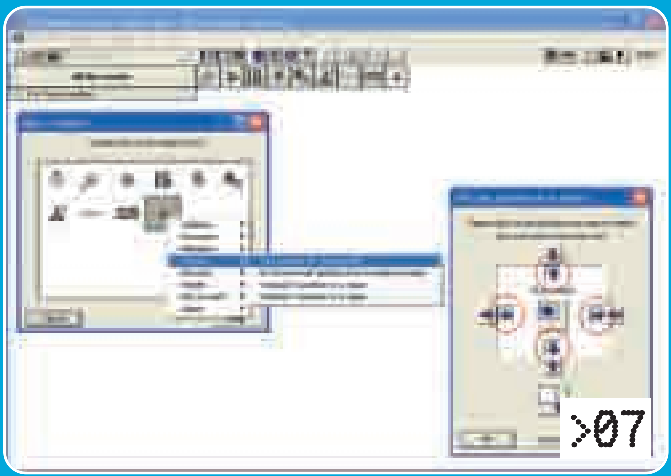
The bat will be controlled by the player using the mouse. To enable this, right-click on the bat and from the pop-up menu choose Movement/ Select Movement. Click the Mouse Controlled button and resize the box to define the limits of the mouse movement (similar to the screenshot above).



Let's give the chrome ball movement too. Right-click it and choose Movement/ Select Movement, but this time press the Bouncing Ball button. Try changing the settings and then press the Try Movement button to test the results until you are happy. Click OK when finished.



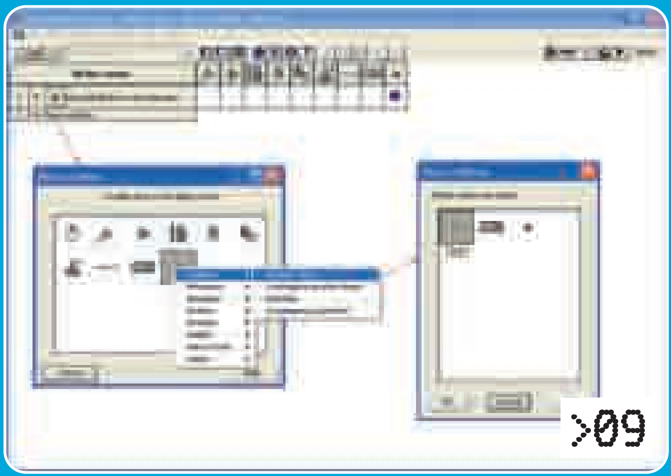
Test the game selecting Run/ Run Game. You'll see the ball fly off the screen. We want to make it bounce off the sides. Press Alt-F4 to stop the game and select Window/ Event Editor. This editor displays a grid of objects across the top and conditions to test for down the side - currently this is empty.



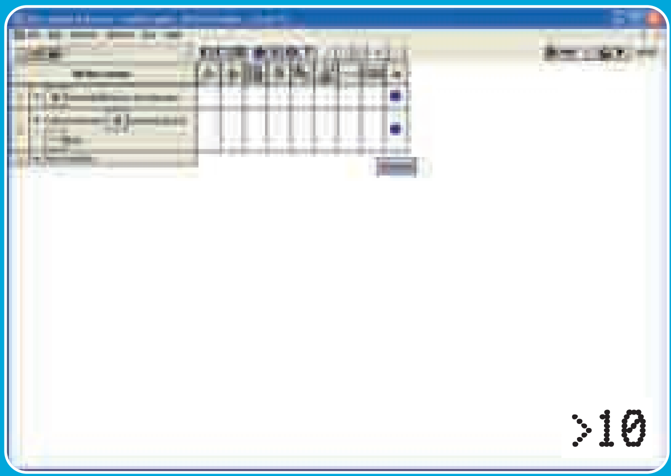
Click on the New Condition option in the editor to bring up a list of objects. Right-click the picture of the chrome ball to bring up a menu of conditions to test for. Select Position/ Test Position Of "Chrome Ball"' and click the four arrows that show the object leaving the play area.



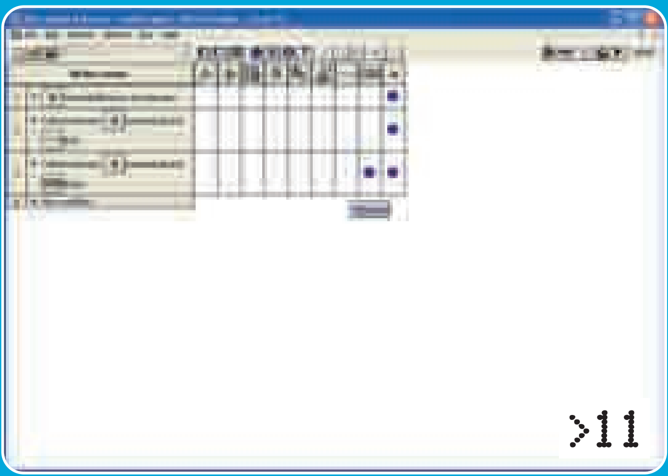
We now have a condition to test for the chrome ball leaving the play area, but we need to tell the ball to bounce when this happens. In the box on event line 1, under the chrome ball column, right-click to get the actions available for it. Choose Movement/ Bounce.



As it stands, the chrome ball will bounce around the screen but goes through the bat. Let's sort that out, otherwise the game won't be much fun. Back in the Event Editor, add an event to test for a collision between the chrome ball and the bat.



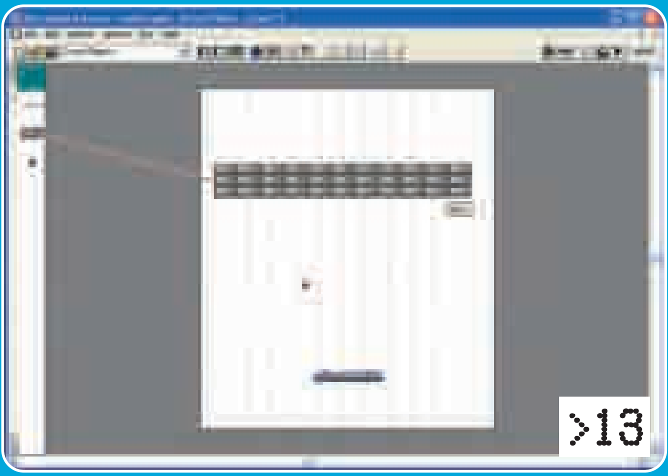
Now add an action under the chrome ball column on event line 2 to make the ball bounce (remember to right-click on the empty action box and choose Movement/ Bounce). Run the game again and you can now hit the ball with the bat.



As in steps 9 and 10, add a new event and condition to make the ball bounce on the brick. Let's add a second action to this event to destroy the brick at the same time. Right-click the action box under the brick column and choose Destroy. If done correctly you should see two actions.



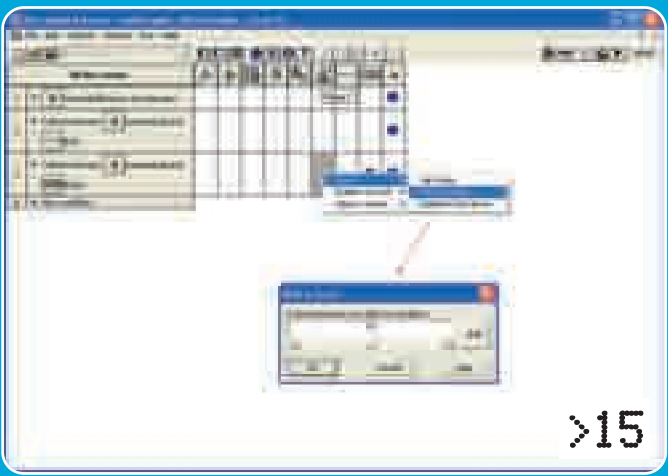
Let's add more than one brick. Return to the Level Editor (Window/ Level Editor), choose Edit/ Editor Preferences and click on the Grid tab. Set the Square size to width 32, height 16 and tick the Snap To and Show Grid boxes. This will make positioning the bricks easier.



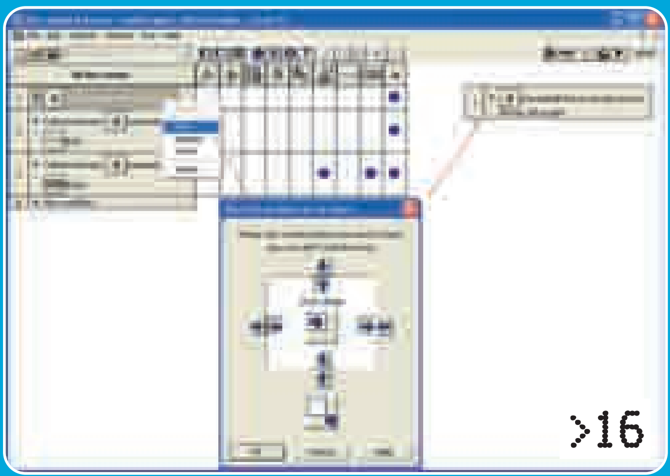
Drag the brick in the level and drop in position near the top left. Add more bricks by dragging them from the Object Shelf, arranging them into lines as illustrated. A quick tip - pick up a brick in the Object Shelf with the left mouse button and press the right mouse button in the level to put several copies down.



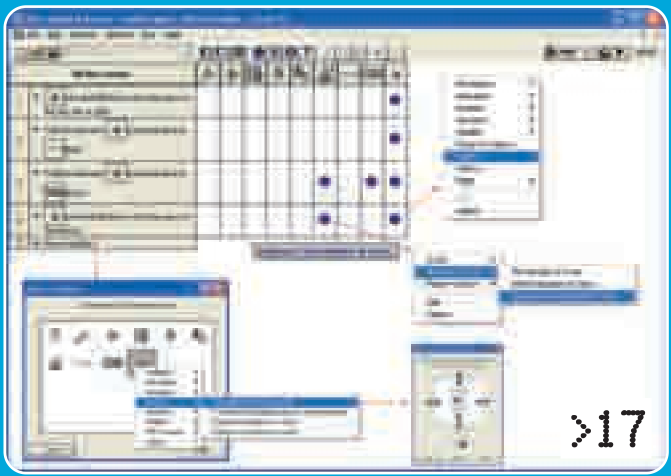
The game is coming together, but we are missing scoring and lives. Click the Create New Object button on the toolbar, select the Score object (123) and then click somewhere in the level to create the score. Do the same to add the lives object. Position the score to the right and the lives to the left.



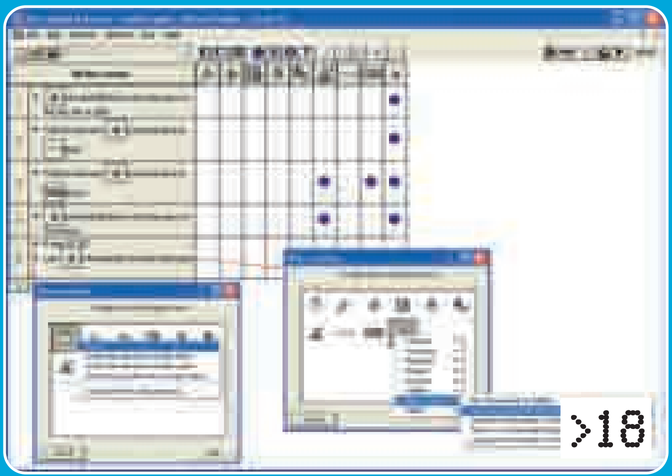
Back in the Event Editor, add an action under the Player 1 column for Event 3 to add 10 to the score. This event line is now saying when the ball collides with the brick, bounce the ball, destroy the brick and add 10 to player 1's score. Run the game to see how it plays.



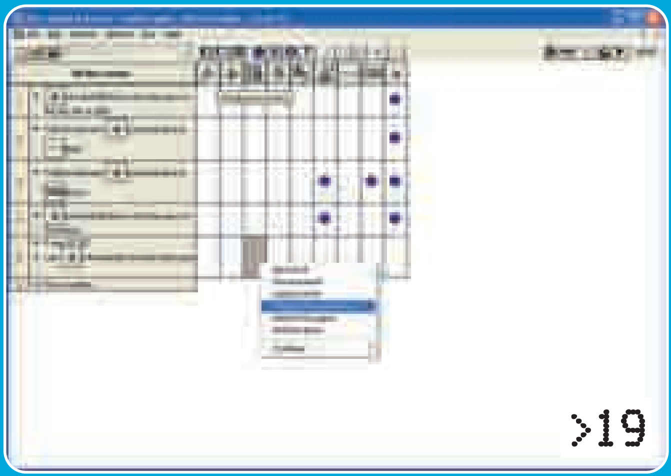
To add challenge to the game we want the player to loose a life when they miss the ball and it goes off the bottom of the screen. Right-click Event 1 and choose edit. Click Leave In The Bottom so it is no longer depressed. Click OK and the condition should say "leaves the play area on the top, left or right".



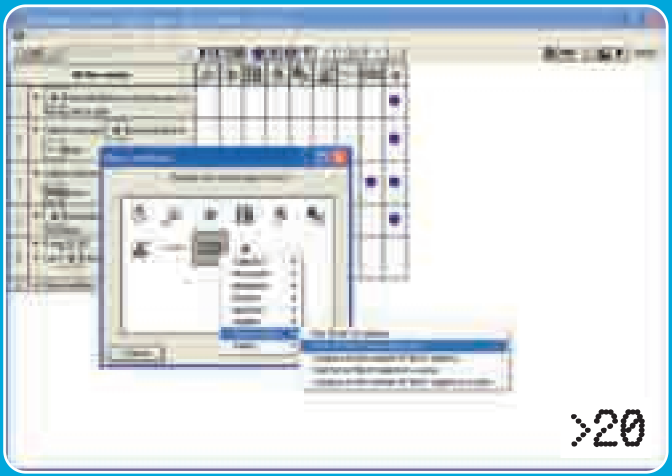
Create a new condition to test when the ball leaves the bottom of the screen only (ie when the player misses it). Give it two actions – to subtract 1 from the number of lives (this particular action is under the Player 1 icon) and destroy the ball.



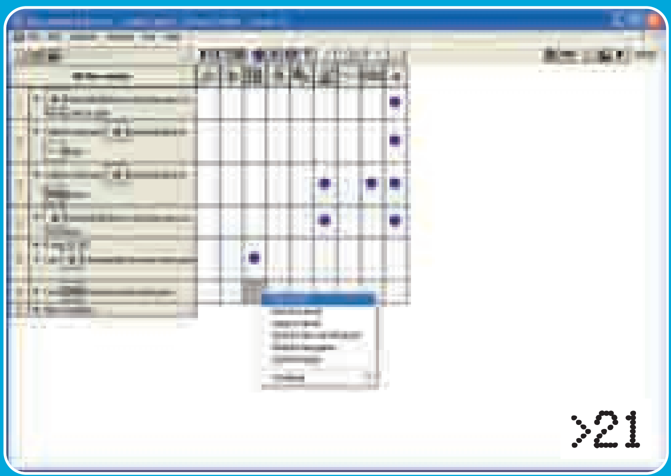
Create a new condition: Pick Or Count/ Have All "Chrome Ball" Been Destroyed. Right-click on the condition text in the Event Editor and select Insert. This will allow us to add another condition to the event. Select The Timer and choose Every. Enter 3 seconds in the box and click OK.



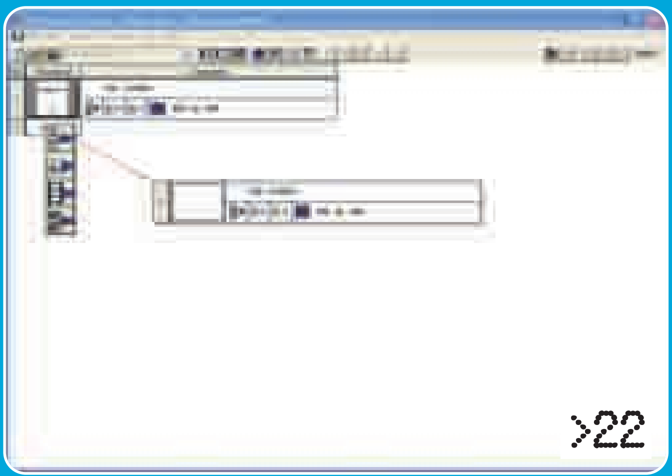
Both these conditions have to be true for any actions to occur. Add an action under the Storyboard Controls column to Restart The Current Level. Having missed the ball and lost a life, the level will be restarted.



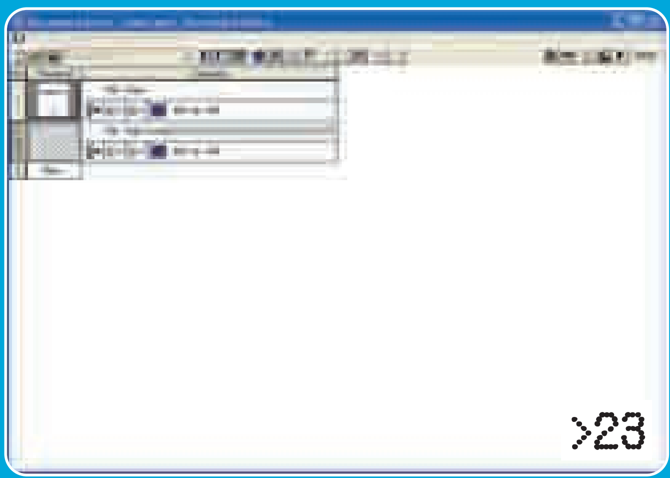
To complete the level the player has to destroy every brick on the screen. You can find an appropriate condition on the brick object under Pick Or Count/ Have All "Brick" Been Destroyed.



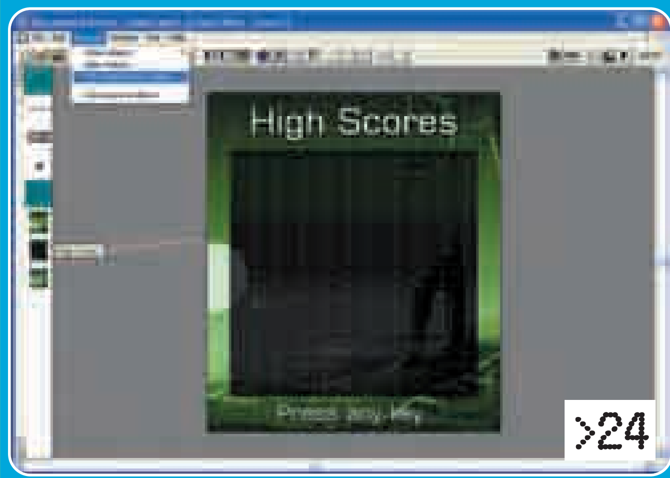
Create an action for this event to go to the next level. You can find this action under the Storyboard Controls column. There are no other levels at the moment, but you can easily add many more levels later.



Let's make the game look professional by adding a high-score screen to it. Go to the Storyboard Editor and right-click on the More label. Click the Add A New Level button and, lo and behold, a new level will appear on the list.



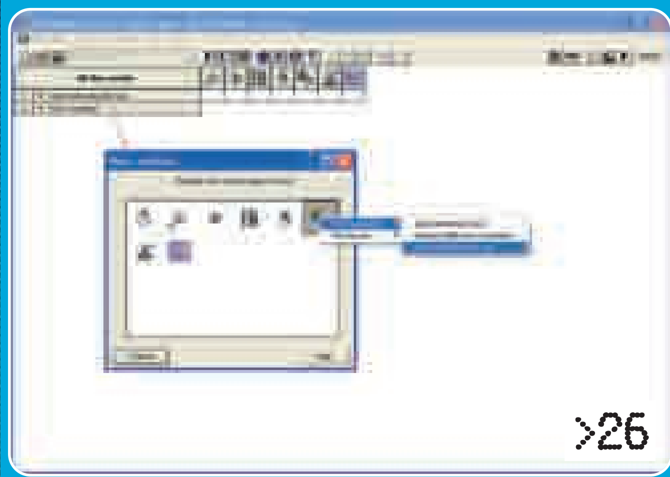
Let's rename the levels so they make more sense. Do this by clicking on the Untitled text next to Title. Change Level 1 to say Game, and Level 2 to say High Scores. Press the '2' button when you have finished.



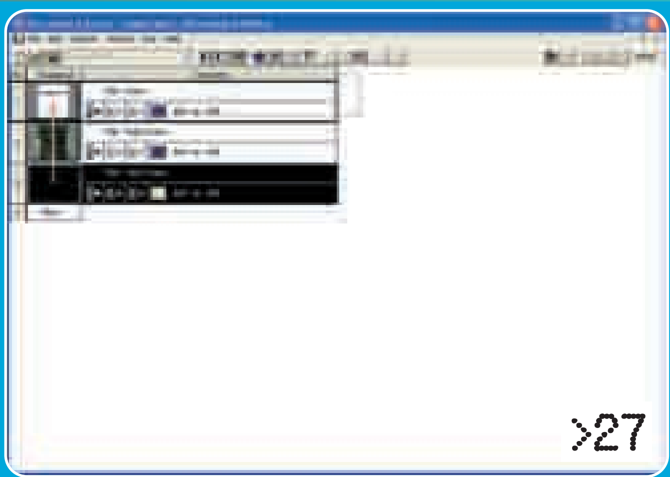
Choose Objects/ Pick Objects From A Game from the menu and once again select the sprites.gam file you unzipped earlier. Drag the High Scores object from the Object Shelf and drop it in the level.



Now click the Create New Object button and press the Hi Scores button. You are presented with many options – experiment a bit here until you are happy. Click in the level to create your new Hi Score object. You can make it fit the black box by right-clicking on the Hi Score object and selecting Resize.



Go to the Event Editor. You'll notice that there are no events yet on Level 2. Add an event to test The Keyboard/ Upon Pressing Any Key. Add an action for this under the Storyboard Controls column to Restart The Game.



Return to the Storyboard Editor and create another new level. Rename this level to Title Screen. The Title Screen needs to be the first screen the player sees. Drag the thumbnail of the Title Screen and drop it over Level 1.

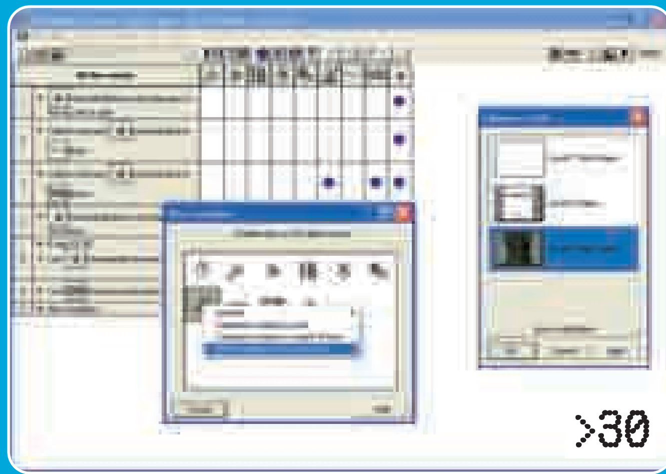


Right-click on the thumbnail of the Title Screen and choose Edit The Level / Events to go directly to the Event Editor. Add an event to test for any key as in step 26, but make its action go to the next level instead of restarting the game.



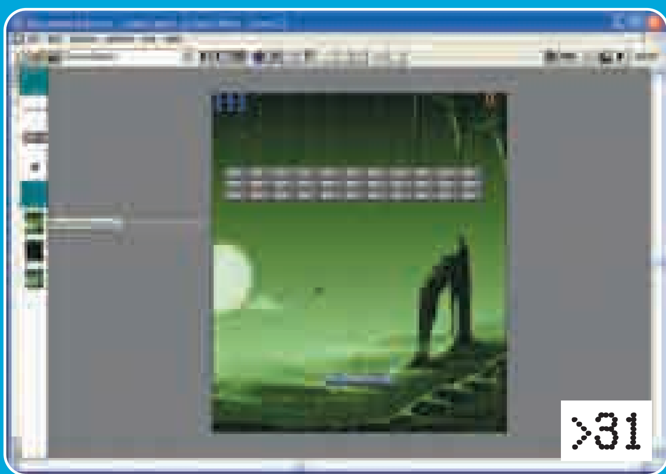
>29

In the Level Editor choose Objects/ Pick Objects From A Game from the menu and again select the sprites.gam file. Drag the Title Screen object from the Object Shelf and drop it in the level. Now we nearly have a complete game!



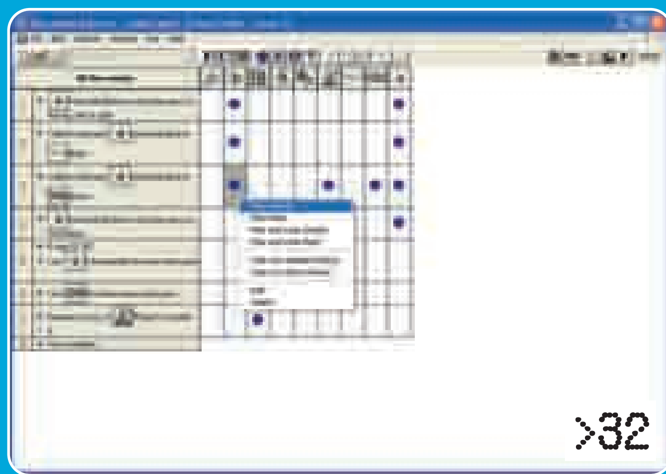
>30

Via the Storyboard Editor, go to the Event Editor for the Game Level. Add one last event to test for When Number Of Lives Reaches 0 (which can be found on the Player 1 icon). Give it an action to Jump To Level and select the Level 3 High Scores.



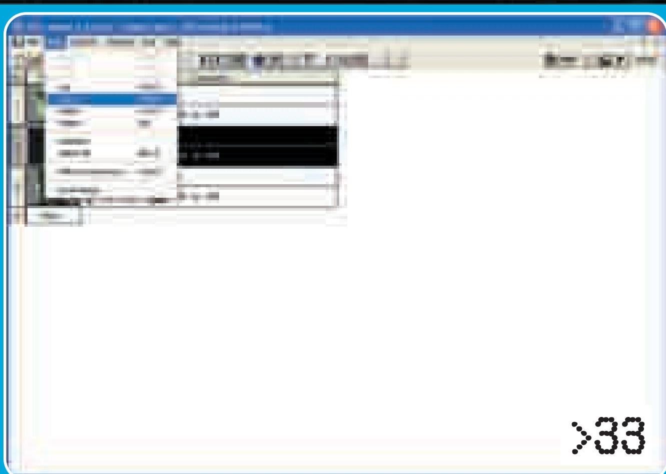
>31

Go to the Level Editor and choose Objects/ Pick Objects From A Game from the menu and select the sprites.gam file one final time. Drag the Game Background object from the Object Shelf and drop it in the level.



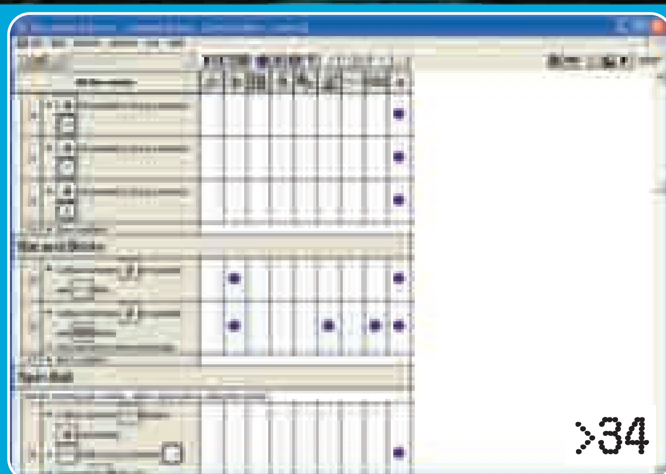
>32

Let's add some sound. Go back to the Event Editor. Under the Sound column, add an action to Event 1, 2 and 3 to Play Samples walls.wav, bat.wav and brick.wav. These three audio files can all be found on the coverdisc.



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A game with one level is not much fun, so let's add more. From the Storyboard Editor click on the thumbnail for the Game Level. Choose File/ Copy, then File/ Paste' and click on the High Scores thumbnail. All you now need to do is create a new arrangement of bricks for each new level



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This guide has only touched the surface of The Games Factory and there is much more to be discovered. Do not be afraid to experiment. The software encourages creativity through exploration and you may be surprised at how quick and easy it is to get results.

Clickteam reader offer

We've teamed up with Clickteam (www.clickteam.com) to offer you its range of development tools at reduced prices. Simply quote the special discount code below when ordering and you'll receive 10% off the usual price



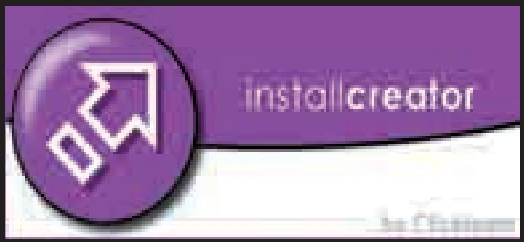
Multimedia Fusion

Multimedia Fusion is the perfect tool for creating games and applications, featuring the powerful graphical programming interface first introduced in Klik & Play. It includes powerful new objects, brand new transitions and a massive multimedia library packed with graphics and sounds (all royalty free). And there's also a special Pro version for more serious developers.



Jamagic

With Jamagic you can create stunning 3D games without learning and mastering a complex language. It includes a fully featured 3D engine with all the commands and controls you need to create commercial-quality 3D games. Jamagic also boasts a 2D sprite engine, resulting in a flexible and affordable development tool that covers all bases.



Install Creator

Install Creator is perhaps the easiest installation distribution tool in existence, letting you spend your time developing and not building the installers. The Standard version provides you with unlimited rights to create installers for both commercial and non-commercial products, while the Pro version is specially designed for people who write shareware with built-in registration codes.



Patch Maker

Patch Maker allows you to update your games and applications without having to re-distribute the full executable file. Patch Maker stores just the differences between the original executable and the updated file, so that patches are extremely small in size. Patch Maker is the complementary product to Install Creator, and you can use both applications to manage and maintain your software.

How to order...

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Product	Usual price	Reader price
Multimedia Fusion	£54.07	£48.66
Multimedia Fusion Pro	£163.30	£146.97
Jamagic	£54.07	£48.66
Install Creator	£32.22	£29.00
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Patch Maker	£32.19	£28.97

Exact prices dependant on exchange rate

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21	22	23	24	25					
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36	37	38	39	40	£3.40	£10.20	£20.40	£11.40	£22.80
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46	47	48	49	50	£6.80	£13.60	£27.80	£14.80	£29.60
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C Visit our website at: **www.livepublishing.co.uk** and complete the form online

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Legend of Kage for the C64 – Wanted on disk. A complete copy preferred as this is quite a rare Imagine game. I'm also looking for this game on tape for the Amstrad CPC in good condition if possible. Email me with details at GStubberfield@yahoo.com

Amiga 500 PD disks wanted – Especially those by 17Bit Software or Newtek. Email me with details and prices to craigthornton@btopenworld.com

Amiga version of Gridtrap wanted – Also looking for Town of Tunes CD, Meeting Pearls CD, and Saitek Megagrip MX-220 Joysticks. Email ian.learmonth@ntlworld.com

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Various SNES games – About 12 for sale. Email for list rburnos@aol.com

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time for the N64 – UK version, boxed with instructions, good condition. £5 + £1.50 insured P&P.
Email: garethcrowley@aimga.e7even.com for photo and details

SEGA FOR SALE

Alien 3 for the Master System for sale – This comes from Arena Entertainment with box and cartridge, though there are no instructions. Open to offers. Email Ramlink666@aol.com for further information.

Huge 28 cm (11 inch) Sonic figure from ReSaurus – Has fully adjustable arms, hands, legs, feet and head. This item is brand new, just unboxed. PayPal welcome. Only £25 plus £5 postage. Email me at peter@jamesmerry.freeserve.co.uk for further information

New box set Dreamcast Sonic Adventure II – Birthday pack, coin, booklet and game. This is the Japanese version, supporting English and Japanese text speech. PayPal welcome. Just £25 with FREE postage. Email me at peter@jamesmerry.freeserve.co.uk

Sega Official SMS Control Stick (Joystick) – Only £15 including postage and packaging. SMS console only with no leads or control pad. £10 including postage and packaging. Email gangee234@fsmail.net for further information.

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Megadrive Landstalker and other RPGs wanted – Particularly looking for any of the following: Final Fantasy games, Phantasy Star and Gunstar Heroes, all volumes for any format. Please email me at Darthmhall@hotmail.com

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Amiga A500 and A1200 For Sale – Complete With ALL Leads. Many other retro items available. Email me for more details to darrenstaker75@hotmail.com

Mini LCD game for sale – This comes in the style of a cocktail table arcade machine measuring 3cm high by 5cm long by 4.5cm wide. Only £4.50 plus £2.29 recorded delivery. Email me at peter@jamesmerry.freeserve.co.uk

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Stallone Cobra and Rambo First Blood Part II – By Ocean on disk for the Amstrad CPC. Please email me with details as I am looking for confirmation to whether or not these games exist on disk for the CPC. Email me at GStubberfield@yahoo.com

RETRO GAMING CLUBS

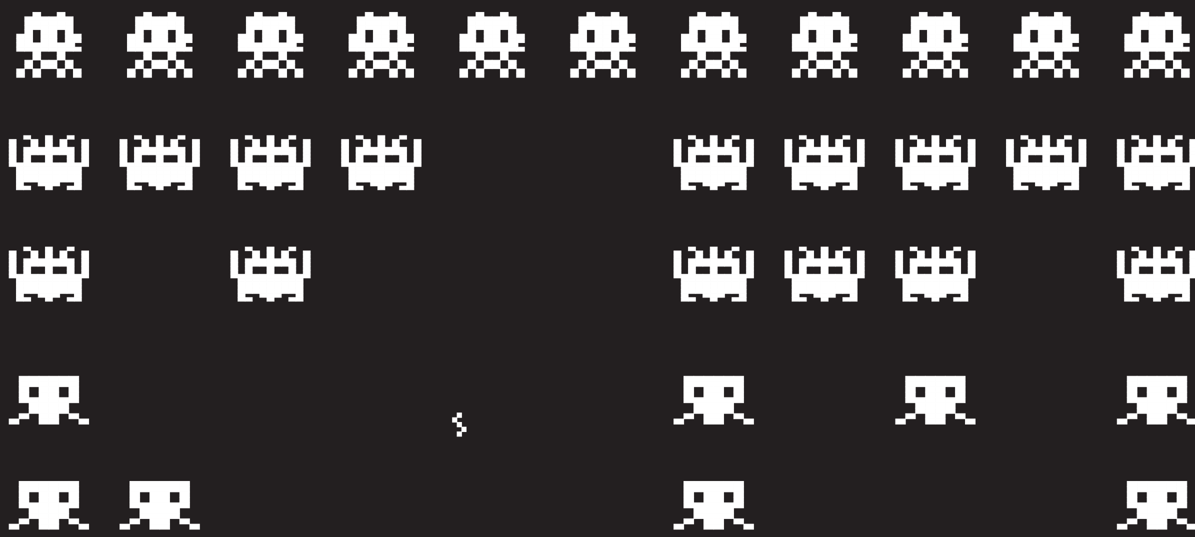
Retro Gaming Interest Group – Based in Ingham, Australia. For further information about us, please phone 0431 815 151

Hello, I'm looking for some members for my Internet forums at www.ingomania.co.uk – Talk about anything retro! (NES Classics layout coming soon, and extended retro zone)!

Dreamcast news and reviews – Past and present (including new imports), with open discussion forums. Check out http://www.dreamcast-lives.tk

Interested in the ZX Spectrum? – Check out ZXF – THE free online publication for all of your Speccy needs. Issue 8 is out now with all the news and views that matter. Download your copy from **www.cwoodcock.co.uk/zxf**

eMag



Endgame

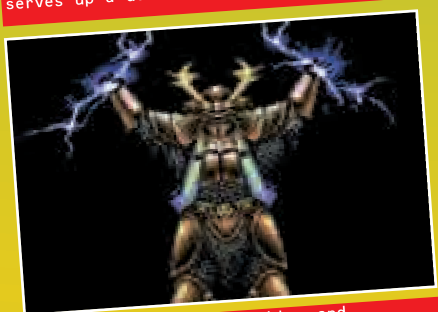
Having kicked and screamed his way though countless levels, defeating hundreds of Ashikaga Clan members, and even venturing through the portals of time itself, Armakuni prepares for the final battle with his sworn enemy Kunitoki. And so concludes the final chapter in The Last Ninja saga...



Armakuni steps into the evil shogun's den, nunchaku at the ready



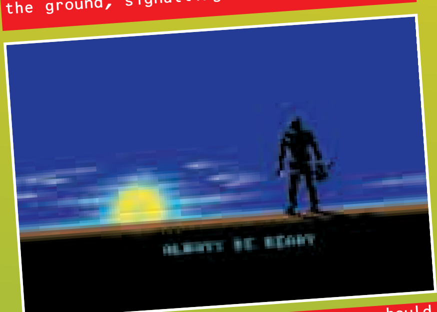
The battle commences, and our hero serves up a double helping of pain



Armakuni lands a killer blow and Kunitoki is finally vanquished



The shogun's ruined headdress crashes to the ground, signalling the story's end...



...but The Last Ninja vows to return should another adversary threaten the world

